

Civil rights attorney speaks on intimidation of Muslim high school students in suburban Detroit following protest in defense of Palestinians

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Parents at Bloomfield Hills High School in suburban Detroit are protesting the attempt by school officials to intimidate students involved in a peaceful protest last week in support of the Palestinians amid the ferocious Israeli bombardment of Gaza that has killed thousands of civilians.

The students at the school, who are Muslim, were not allowed back into class until they answered questions about their intentions. Students who refused to answer questions without their parents present were not allowed back into classes pending an investigation. As of this writing all the students have been allowed to return, but their families are considering their options to prevent future harassment of students for their political beliefs.

The school, located in a wealthy Detroit suburb, is one of the top schools in Michigan. Earlier this year pro-Israel and pro-Zionist parents of students at the school organized to force the resignation of Principal Lawrence Stroughter for permitting a Palestinian American activist to speak at student diversity assemblies.

The Bloomfield Hills student protest last week was part of walkouts by hundreds of high school students to protest the Israeli genocide against the people of Gaza in Philadelphia, San Francisco, Dearborn (Michigan) and other cities across the United States. They join millions of workers and young people who have staged protests around the world over the attack on Gaza, which has the backing of the entire US political establishment and corporate-controlled media.

Both college and high school students who have engaged in these anti-war protests have faced a vicious backlash. In a high-profile case, students at Harvard University who issued an open letter in defense of the Palestinians faced censure by the US Senate for allegedly promoting “antisemitism” and “expressing solidarity with terrorists.” They also faced doxxing, in which their names and home addresses were made public and future employment threatened.

The national media slandered the protests by high school students in Dearborn on October 20 as “pro-terrorist.” The same day, hundreds of students from about 20 Philadelphia high schools marched around city hall in support of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Amy Doukoure, a staff attorney with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Michigan Chapter, who has worked in providing legal assistance for the families of Bloomfield Hills students. The family of one student who had initially not been allowed to return to class after not answering questions about her political beliefs had initially scheduled a press conference for Tuesday, but later decided to cancel due to concern over possible backlash.

Doukoure explained, “The students had planned to do a walkout and from what the students say, they had told the administration they wanted to raise awareness over civilian deaths in Palestine. The school administrators admitted they tried to discourage that kind of protest. They called it ‘divisive.’ In the end the school realized they couldn’t stop it, so they let it happen. Then they had parents from the school, who were not permitted to be on school grounds, video recording the students, in what the students claimed was an intimidating manner. Then the same parents went and complained about what the students were saying.”

She continued, “The school instituted what they called a ‘threat assessment.’ They called in every single student and asked what they said. Asked them why they said it. Asked what their intent was, if anything they said could be considered hate speech, and what their intentions were about the protest in general and what they thought the Jewish students felt about it.

“Any student who answered the questions were allowed to go back to class. Any students who didn’t answer the questions, who said ‘I didn’t do anything wrong, all I did

was peacefully protest,' they were removed from class and told they were going to have to meet with a school safety officer, which they took to mean a law enforcement officer, prior to being allowed to return. That is how we got involved. Parents were concerned with the aggressive nature of the way students were being questioned and the threat of law enforcement involvement.

"I think it is important that the protests in favor of Palestine or support for Gaza, any free speech, like calling calling for a ceasefire to protect civilian homes and hospitals in Gaza, is being met with such resistance and detestation from our officials in a way that we have not seen in a very long time in this country. It has the effect of chilling speech and squashing discourse that should be taking place around these issues."

Doukoure said that the attempts to silence protests over the assault on Gaza had led to an upsurge in threats of violence and actual attacks on Muslims in the US. "After October 7 we started to get a lot of calls about different incidents. People being disciplined at work, people being doxxed online for speaking out. Hate rhetoric, threats to Dearborn. In the first two weeks we realized our intakes about intimidation had risen 250 percent more than in any previous two-week period for last four years.

"There has been a concerted effort by the media to provide only one specific viewpoint of what is going on. Our government, including Florida governor Ron DeSantis, have really created the narrative that only one viewpoint is valid. That is dangerous. We know what happens when you try to squelch opposing viewpoints. That leads to fascism. That leads to the ability to carry out a genocide of an entire people, and we have seen that happen.

"Even those who live in heavily Muslim areas have been abjectly silent or have given misinformation. [Michigan Democratic Congresswoman] Debbie Dingell got on Fox2's 'Let it Rip' two weekends ago and repeated the claim that Israeli children had been beheaded, and she did it at a time when every major news media source had retracted that claim after Israel said there was no evidence it ever happened. CNN, MSNBC, Fox—all of them had retracted it. But she reiterated that. And when she was confronted on the air about that specific statement and how inaccurate it was, she said 'I stand by my comments.' She waited until they were off the air and said 'I am sorry about that.' But she doubled down while on the air. That is the kind of misinformation that leads to the stabbing of a six-year-old Muslim boy in Chicago.

"The general public is being fed a specific narrative about what is going on. Anything that doesn't fit that narrative is being silenced. The best indication of that is the protest by Jewish Voice for Peace in New York where they shut down

Grand Central Station. That was an amazing accomplishment and effort as well as the shutting down of our Congressional buildings last week. I think that creates a different narrative that Muslims are not used to seeing. The media has created this narrative of this as a culture war or religious war, when it's really not. I think things like that are going to change how people perceive what is going on."

She pointed to the unprecedented media blackout of the mass protests taking place in the US and worldwide over the Israeli genocide in Gaza. "We had a protest in Detroit in Hart Plaza Saturday and had tens of thousands of people there and the protest was over a mile long. Not a single major outlet in Detroit reported on it, not one."

The intimidation of pro-Palestine students at Bloomfield Hills High School follows an incident last year when hostile parents flooded a school board meeting media posts to denounce the appearance of Palestinian American activist Huwaida Arraf, who is a Christian woman married to an Israeli Jew. Arraf described her experience of discrimination as a Palestinian American and the mistreatment of Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank. Her remarks were denounced as "antisemitic."

"We are seeing a continuation of that kind of activity," Doukoure said. "There have been repercussions rippling through the high school since."

The Bloomfield Hills High School students and every student facing harassment and intimidation deserve the broadest support. Workers and young people who want to get involved in the fight to oppose the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the war in the Middle East should contact the WSWs and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact