

Growing opposition to Gaza genocide at Columbia University

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Last Wednesday, roughly 30 Columbia University (CU) students staged a walkout of a lecture given by former first lady, former US Secretary of State and 2016 US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. She remains one of the most prominent—and widely hated—figures of the Democratic Party, and was recently appointed a professorship at Columbia University.

The protest was organized by members of the Columbia School of International and Public Affairs Student Association (SIPASA) in support of over a dozen students and two professors who had been victimized by far-right “doxing trucks” that were recently deployed on campus.

The trucks have been shown to be owned by the conservative news media agency Accuracy in Media (AIM). The purpose of the vehicles, which have electronic billboards on the sides, is to single out and slander students and faculty as antisemitic for speaking out in support of the Palestinians in the recent Israeli offensive which began last month. The AIM trucks had initially been seen at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) prior to arriving at Columbia in late October.

CU students and faculty whose faces appeared on the mobile displays under the text “Columbia’s Leading Antisemites” were specifically being targeted for signing a principled statement on October 7 in opposition to Israeli and imperialist violence against Palestine.

Roughly 100 other students joined the walkout in the lobby of the Global Affairs building as SIPASA students distributed flyers containing a list of several demands addressed to the university administration. The demands were centered around the upholding of free speech without fear of retaliation or intimidation, along with calls for investigations into how students’ personal information was leaked from an allegedly private school database into the hands of the right-wing media conglomerate.

SIPASA also denounced AIM’s creation of a website entitled “Columbia Hates Jews” which listed the students and was equipped with an interface allowing users to send hate mail to the university to demand that it “take action”

against them.

Demonstrators shouted down SIPA Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo as she escorted Clinton out of the lecture hall and attempted damage control over the walkout. According to the *Columbia Spectator*, the main student newspaper, protesters called on the administration to “ensure the right to free speech and unconditional access to our leadership,” as well as to “protect the reputation of students defamed for engaging in legitimate political discourse.”

Significantly, the SIPASA students who signed the October 7 statement have garnered important support from university professors. Roughly 170 Columbia and Barnard faculty members from dozens of departments signed a joint October 30 letter defending the rights of the victimized students to “robust debate” on the issue of the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza. Their letter categorically denounced the accusations that the students are antisemitic. It has now been signed by some of the most prominent faculty members of Columbia University, including economic historian Adam Tooze.

Students across the country who have similarly had their personal information leaked have faced a barrage of online and physical harassment, death threats, retaliation by employers and other forms of assault. This has been the result of the poisoning of the political atmosphere stemming from the propaganda campaign deliberately whipped up by the US political establishment in support of Israel, its primary geostrategic ally in the Middle East. Israel’s onslaught in Gaza is becoming the occasion for the expansion of a broader world war between the US, Iran, Russia and China.

Viciously pro-Israel elements in academic institutions which enjoy the backing of the American state, military and intelligence apparatuses have doubled down on a campaign of slander and intimidation of anti-Israel views. They have repeated the stock-in-trade line that Judaism equals Zionism, and therefore that opposition to Israel equals antisemitism. On October 20, a Columbia Business School professor rabidly denounced the university’s president Minouche

Shafik for not taking a hard enough stance against “pro-terror” (i.e. pro-Palestinian) student organizations, and called on her, in no uncertain terms, to “eradicate” such groups.

In a phenomenon that has been referred to as “donor revolt,” foundations and individuals which financially sponsor prestigious institutions in the US have staged a media outcry over the tolerance of pro-Palestinian speech on campus. Many such donors have announced the withdrawal of their funding to academic programs, while others, including billionaire Bill Ackman, called for the public release of personally identifying information of pro-Palestinian students so that they could be blackballed from employment in the future.

On October 27, the US Senate unanimously passed a resolution introduced by far-right Senator Josh Hawley which officially sanctioned the slander of pro-Palestinian political speech on American campuses.

Clinton’s Columbia lecture was itself part of a recent, state-backed initiative to promote connections between students and US imperialist foreign policy. The exclusive course, entitled “Inside the Situation Room,” was initiated as the flagship class of SIPA’s newly formed Institute of Global Politics (IGP). The IGP was developed jointly between Clinton and Yarhi-Milo, the latter a former Israeli intelligence officer prior to her career in academia, and the spouse of a former spokesperson for the Israeli Mission. Each of the lecture series’ roughly 370 students was screened by the Secret Service prior to enrollment, according to the *New York Times*.

The walk-out from Clinton’s lecture occurred amidst a rapidly developing global anti-war movement against the genocidal onslaught by Israel against Gaza, which has now claimed the lives of over 10,000 Palestinians. These sentiments have been expressed by widespread protests at universities including CU, NYU, Harvard, UPenn, Northwestern, and UC Berkeley, as well as demonstrations of millions of youth, students and workers that have been taking place internationally.

Over the weekend, and for the third weekend in a row, mass protests took place in city after city across the globe. Demonstrations have been of an increasingly anti-establishment character, with demands for a ceasefire coming up against unanimous opposition by the representatives of all of the major imperialist powers. A march in Washington D.C. on Saturday involved roughly a quarter of a million demonstrators.

In order for the anti-war movement to succeed, it must make a decisive shift in orientation toward the working class, the only social force capable of ending the genocide. Indeed, the past week has above all been marked by the

growing intervention of the working class in this emerging anti-war movement.

Last month, a coalition of all of the major Palestinian trade unions published a call for workers to strike against weapons manufacturing and distribution centers that service Israel, as well as to urge their own unions to pass resolutions to similar ends. Since then, airport workers in Belgium, and dock workers in Barcelona, Spain, have begun to take action to stop weapons deliveries to Israel. Healthcare workers around the globe have also begun to engage in protest against the atrocities in Gaza witnessed daily.

In the US, the center of world imperialism, the struggle of the working class takes the form of a direct fight against the corrupt labor leadership of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, which strangles at every turn opposition to austerity wages and working conditions, and opposition to war. Socialist autoworker and rank-and-file candidate for United Auto Workers president last year, Will Lehman, recently issued a statement calling for the widespread mobilization of the working class to shut down production of munitions to Israel. He stated the following:

I unequivocally denounce the Israeli government’s ongoing slaughter of the people of Palestine, which has the full backing of the US government and both capitalist political parties. What is taking place is nothing less than a war crime, and the working class must be alerted and mobilized to stop it.

We urge all students interested in taking up this fight to contact the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) to get involved today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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