

Brandeis and Columbia universities suspend pro-Palestinian student groups

John Conrad, Clara Weiss
11 November 2023

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) opposes and condemns the decision by Columbia University and Brandeis University to disaffiliate pro-Palestinian student organizations as an unacceptable attack on the democratic rights of the entire student body and the working class.

After far-right Florida Governor Ron DeSantis banned the Students for Justice for Palestine (SJP) in the state university system, Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, on Monday became the first private university to ban the chapter from campus. Echoing the rhetoric of both the Israeli government and figures like DeSantis, the university claimed that the student group “openly supports Hamas, a terrorist organization.”

Brandeis University President Ronald Liebowitz published an opinion piece in the *Boston Globe* the same day calling on the administrators of higher educational institutions across the US to suppress any pro-Palestinian sentiment on campuses. He libeled students and faculty opposed to the US-backed genocide being carried out by Israel in Gaza as celebrating “the barbaric killing of Jews just because they are Jews,” and wrote that universities “should confront antisemitism on campus” and pull funding from all organizations not fully backing imperialist barbarism.

On Wednesday, Harvard University Chabad President Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi called on the university to ban the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), which has over 20,000 followers on Instagram and has faced relentless attacks since October 7 for its support of Palestinian resistance to oppression.

On Thursday, at Brown University, 20 students were arrested for staging a sit-in protest at the University Hall main building. Hundreds of students reportedly sang and chanted in solidarity outside as the students were loaded into prisoner transport vans by police.

Then, on Friday, Columbia University in New York

followed Brandeis by suspending not only the SJP but also the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) through the end of the fall term. Like the SJP, the JVP has played a central role in the organization of protests in the US against the genocide in Gaza, which have drawn tens of thousands over the last month.

The moves to ban the SJP and JVP mark a significant escalation of the state-led attempts to criminalize all opposition to the crimes of American imperialism and its Zionist proxy force in the Middle East. They must be opposed by all workers, students and youth.

The grounds upon which the SJP and JVP were suspended at Columbia could be used to ban any student organization. Columbia University Chair of the Special Committee on Campus Safety Gerald Rosberg justified the move by claiming that “the two groups repeatedly violated University policies related to holding campus events, culminating in an unauthorized event Thursday afternoon that proceeded despite warnings and included threatening rhetoric and intimidation.”

This is outright slander. The event to which Rosberg is referring was a peaceful protest organized by the SJP and JVP at Columbia on Thursday, November 9 as part of nationwide protests. The SJP and JVP called on students to leave class at 2:00 p.m. that day and convene for a “peaceful protest art installation” on the university’s campus. The demonstration was an exercise of their right to free speech.

But the Columbia University administration had clearly worked on fabricating a pretext to ban the organizations. On Wednesday, dozens of students staged a sit-in protest at the Columbia University School of Social Work (CSSW), declaring their solidarity “with the Palestinian national resistance” and expressing “support for students and faculty facing retaliation for their solidarity.” The students distributed a flyer with demands, including “CSSW must ensure the right to free speech and stop

preventing dialogue related to Palestinian liberation in the school, namely through the prevention of defamation and doxing of students and faculty.”

The protest action was endorsed by Columbia SJP. In a highly unusual move, university officials distributed leaflets to protesting students claiming they were in violation of “the Rules of University Conduct” because they were interrupting a university event, and threatening them with “interim sanctions by the Provost up to and including suspension for the rest of the semester” if they did not immediately end the sit-in.

The crackdown on the SJP and JVP at Columbia University and other institutions is no doubt being prepared and discussed at the highest levels of the American state and the Democratic Party, and most likely with the Israeli state as well. Columbia University’s Board of Trustees, like that of Harvard and other leading universities, is packed with Wall Street millionaire and billionaire Democratic Party operatives.

In response to several protests on the campus against the genocide, which were principally organized by the SJP and JVP, a business school assistant professor, Shai Davidai, posted a video on Twitter calling for the “eradication” of pro-Palestinian student organizations. His far-right tirade, given before a small crowd of Zionist students at Columbia, was posted on Twitter and immediately shared by the official account of the Israeli government.

When a “doxing truck” owned by conservative news media agency Accuracy in Media (AIM) drove around Columbia’s campus, displaying pictures of pro-Palestinian students and faculty and smearing them as “Columbia’s Leading Antisemites,” the university administration did nothing, implicitly encouraging this type of witch-hunting.

Then, on November 1, 30 students walked out of a lecture given by former first lady, former US secretary of state and 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Some 100 students then joined the protest. The arch warmonger, who was recently appointed to the faculty of Columbia, had to be escorted from the lecture hall as students called for the university administration to “ensure the right to free speech and unconditional access to our leadership” and to “protect the reputation of students defamed for engaging in legitimate political discourse.”

Since then, reports have emerged on X/Twitter suggesting that Columbia University has been surveilling social media posts by Muslim students and reporting them

to the NYPD (New York Police Department), which is notorious for its close ties to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF.)

The universities’ attack on opposition to genocide and war is part of a broader effort by the ruling classes in the US and other major imperialist powers to strangle the developing mass movement against war.

Last month, the US Senate passed a resolution by unanimous consent slandering pro-Palestinian students for “expressing solidarity with terrorists” and promoting “antisemitism.” The resolution was supported by every Democrat and Republican. It specifically named various university chapters of the SJP. Last week, the US House of Representatives voted to censure Representative Rashida Tlaib (Democrat-Michigan) for her opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza in an unprecedented attack on democratic rights.

Over the last week alone, millions around the world have continued to hold mass demonstrations and forcefully voice their opposition to the Zionist state and its imperialist backers. Many tens of thousands of students and youth have participated in and organized demonstrations.

Aware that there is little support in the working class and among young people for the genocidal slaughter in Gaza and fearful that this massive opposition will develop into a movement against capitalism more broadly, the ruling class, through its state, media and academic institutions, is battering the public with propaganda and criminalizing left-wing antiwar sentiment.

The opposition to this assault on democratic rights is a critical component of developing and broadening the emerging mass anti-war movement and turning it to the international working class, the decisive force in society, which can defend democratic rights and put an end to the genocide in Gaza and the danger of world war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)