

US Department of Education announces probe into alleged antisemitism on college campuses

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The US Department of Education announced Thursday that it has launched investigations into six universities and one public school district for alleged violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Five of the investigations are related to allegations of antisemitism and two are related to alleged incidences of Islamophobia.

The schools currently under investigation are Columbia University, Cornell University, the University of Pennsylvania, Wellesley College, Lafayette College, the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and Maize Unified School District in Kansas.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona told CNN that he expects more investigations will be forthcoming. Cardona warned that schools which fail to comply with the department's recommendations risk losing federal funding.

Details of the specific allegations under investigation have not been released. However, the investigations come amid an intensifying campaign led by the Biden administration to suppress growing opposition to Israel's genocidal war against Gaza, which has the full backing of the Democratic White House and US imperialism. Central to this campaign is the smearing of opposition to Israel's war crimes as "antisemitic."

On college campuses, students have been doxxed, blacklisted and penalized by administrators for voicing political opposition to the escalating US-Israel genocide, which has already claimed the lives of more than 12,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children. The Israeli Ministry of the Interior has itself defined the aim of the war on Gaza to be the removal of the Palestinian population through a combination of mass killings and forced expulsion from the territory.

There is a particularly perverse and vile irony in the attempt to brand opponents of ethnic cleansing in occupied Palestine, which include many thousands of Jews in the US and around the world, as "antisemites," given the tragic fate of European Jewry in the Holocaust.

The investigations into the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and Wellesley College follow a federal civil rights complaint filed on November 9 against the schools by the Brandeis Center, a Zionist organization founded by Kenneth Marcus, former assistant secretary of education for civil rights under Donald Trump. The Brandeis Center has student chapters at law schools throughout the

US, whose stated purpose includes fighting "anti-Israelism," countering the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, and promoting "Israel legal advocacy."

The complaints against Penn and Wellesley state that "Zionism is an integral part of Jewish ethnic and ancestral identity for many Jewish students," and, on that basis, argues that anti-Zionism constitutes "erasive anti-Semitism."

Last week, Penn President Liz Magill issued two statements alleging incidences of antisemitism on campus. The first cited "vile, disturbing antisemitic emails threatening violence to members of our Jewish community." It added that the FBI had been informed of a potential hate crime. However, a campus police investigation found "no credible threat" to campus safety. The details of these emails have not been released.

Magill issued a second statement last week in which she denounced "vile, antisemitic messages [that] were projected onto several campus buildings." Multiple news reports that repeated the claim of "vile antisemitism" showed images with the projected messages blurred out. However, pictures of the projections shared on social media disprove this slanderous allegation.

The so-called "hateful" messages included the following: "Free Palestine," "Let Gaza Live," "Liz Magill: call for ceasefire now," "From the Sea to the River, Palestine will live forever," and "10,000 murdered by Israeli occupation since October 7."

Wellesley College confirmed to local news that the Department of Education investigation is related to the complaint filed by the Brandeis Center. In this instance too, the allegation of antisemitism rests upon students' opposition to Zionism. On October 19, student resident assistants sent an email to their dormitory's residents stating that "there should be no space, no consideration, and no support for Zionism within the Wellesley College community." The university forced the students to issue an apology.

As of Friday morning, both Lafayette College in Pennsylvania and the Maize Unified School District in Kansas said that while they had received notification of Department of Education investigations, neither had been given details of the allegations.

Cooper Union did not comment on the investigation, though it follows the attempts last month by the corporate media to portray a peaceful Palestine solidarity protest on campus as an antisemitic rampage. Reports of Jewish students being "barricaded" and

locked in the library in the face of threats to their safety were soon debunked. City officials later acknowledged that some pro-Israel counter-protesters voluntarily waited in the library during the protest, and that school officials closed the library for approximately 20 minutes.

At Cornell University, the specific allegations under investigation are not known, but may be related to the arrest last month of Cornell student Patrick Dai. He was arrested and charged in federal court for multiple alleged internet posts that made violent threats, including threats to “shoot up” the predominantly Kosher dining hall on campus.

Columbia University did not comment on the investigation. The elite university has been one of the focal points of the government-led campaign to intimidate and ban student opposition to the genocide in Gaza. As at a number of other universities, the far-right media group Accuracy in Media drove its “doxing” truck around campus with the names and images of students alleged to be affiliated with pro-Palestinian groups.

Last week, Columbia suspended the student organizations Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), claiming that the groups’ peaceful protests and sit-ins “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.”

Building upon the month-long campaign to slander and intimidate students, the growing efforts to ban student groups and campus protests outright mark a significant escalation in the attempts to criminalize all opposition to the war crimes of the US and its Israeli ally. In Florida, far-right governor and Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis was the first to issue an order to deactivate SJP chapters in the state university system. Brandeis University has also banned the SJP.

This week, the administration of George Washington University (GWU) announced the suspension of the campus SJP chapter for at least 90 days following a peaceful protest action in which students projected messages onto a university library building. As with the projected messages at Penn, the GWU administration turned reality on its head. The messages, which university President Ellen Granberg declared to be “antisemitic,” included, “End the siege on Gaza,” and “GW is complicit in genocide in Gaza.”

The federal investigations by the Biden administration into US colleges occur against the backdrop of growing opposition to the genocidal war against Gaza, while the barrage of propaganda and lies used by the Biden administration to justify war crimes are rapidly breaking down.

The Department of Education’s announcement follows the pro-genocide “March for Israel” in Washington D.C. on Tuesday, at which leaders of both parties of US imperialism joined hands to declare their unconditional support for Israel and its war crimes. The event featured speeches from real antisemites, including evangelical pastor John Hagee, who has previously stated that Hitler was sent by God to drive the Jewish people “back to the land of Israel.”

The investigation was also announced one day after US Capitol

Police violently assaulted Jewish activists who held a peaceful vigil and protest demanding a ceasefire at the headquarters of the Democratic Party in Washington D.C.

Having failed in its desperate attempts to intimidate protesters by equating criticism of the US-backed genocide with “antisemitism,” including demands for a ceasefire by Jewish activists, the ruling class is directly resorting to anti-democratic and repressive measures, in violation of constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and political expression, to censor opposition. The threat to withhold funding from public universities and school districts, many of which already face massive budget deficits, is a directive to school administrators to crack down on political opposition.

At the same time, the lie that the interests of the Jewish people are represented by the policies of the state of Israel, a state founded on ethnic cleansing and genocidal violence, creates conditions for a dangerous equivalency between Zionism and Judaism.

The character of the Democratic Party stands exposed to workers and youth throughout the United States and internationally. As the protests and demonstrations demanding a ceasefire continue to grow, they are being met with increasingly violent and anti-democratic attacks.

As the WSWS has explained, imperialist war abroad requires a war against the rights of the working class at home, and the Democrats will readily lock arms with fascistic Republicans, including supporters of Donald Trump and defenders of the January 6, 2021 attempted overthrow of Joe Biden’s election, to wage this two-front war. The fight to end the genocide requires a political struggle against both parties of American imperialism.

Students who agree with this perspective should reach out today to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, which is fighting to defend the democratic rights of students and link the struggle against war to the growing class struggle against capitalism.



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