

Billionaire Bill Ackman targets MIT's President Kornbluth

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Right-wing billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman, who played a central role in the forced resignation of Harvard University President Claudine Gay, is now doubling down on a campaign to oust the President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Sally Kornbluth.

On X, formerly Twitter, Ackman announced that he would launch a plagiarism check of Kornbluth, a cell biologist, as well as of the school's faculty and its board members. Unfounded charges of "plagiarism" were central to the media campaign, led by both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, leading up to Gay's ouster.

Along with Gay and the former president of the University of Pennsylvania, Elizabeth Magill, Kornbluth participated in a Congressional hearing in which far-right Republican Elise Stefanik—herself a promoter of the antisemitic "Great Replacement Theory"—interrogated the university presidents, charging them ludicrously with supporting a "genocide of the Jews." After the hearing, Magill resigned. A bipartisan House resolution, voted for by 84 Democrats, called on both Gay and Kornbluth to leave their positions as well.

Ackman's campaign against Kornbluth and Gay takes on an almost farcical character by recent revelations in *Business Insider* that his wife, Israeli-born Neri Oxman, a former star professor at MIT, had lifted entire passages from Wikipedia and other authors' works for her 2010 dissertation and other academic writings. BI claimed, "At least 15 passages from her 2010 MIT doctoral dissertation were lifted without any citation from Wikipedia entries." Some of the accusations were confirmed by Oxman.

Ackman, who demanded Harvard University President Claudine Gay resign over "serious plagiarism

issues," said that "Rewarding [Gay] with a highly paid faculty position sets a very bad precedent for academic integrity at Harvard." He wrote on X in response to the accusations: "Part of what makes [Oxman] human is that she makes mistakes, owns them, and apologizes when appropriate." Compared to her case, the charges against Gay, who was found to have engaged in "a few instances of inadequate citations"—a charge that does not rise to the level of plagiarism—were minor at best.

It is now clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that this campaign has nothing to do with preventing a supposedly all-pervasive "antisemitism" on campus. The only people subject to genocide today are the Palestinians. The threat of antisemitism is real, but it emanates primarily from the state and the halls of the Republican Party, which are being emboldened and legitimized in this campaign. Moreover, it has nothing to do with safeguarding academic standards and opposing "plagiarism."

The campaign is directed from the top layers of the corporate financial and academic elite, aimed at silencing all opposition to the genocide in Gaza and the crimes of imperialism and capitalism more broadly. The university presidents that are now targeted are under attack not so much because of their own political views—which are broadly in line with the mainstream of the Democratic Party—but because they are viewed as insufficiently harsh in the crackdown on student protesters against the genocide. The goal of their removal is a complete restructuring of academia and its subordination to the interests of US foreign policy and the financial oligarchy.

As we previously noted, the forcing out of Magill and then Gay was only the opening shot in a far-right campaign in academia. As a *Wall Street Journal* headline by Aaron Zitner read on January 4, amid a

flurry of celebration by right-wing outlets over Gay's resignation, "Conservatives Toppled Two College Presidents. They're Not Done Yet."

Ackman too has made clear that other university presidents will be targeted, tweeting on January 6, "Don't we have to do a deep dive into academic integrity at Harvard as well? What about Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Penn, Dartmouth? You get the point."

A January 6 article in the *New York Times*, "How Harvard's Board Broke up with Claudine Gay," noted on the basis of insider reports that it was the Harvard Board's request for Gay to resign on December 27 that precipitated her resignation. A central role in this request was played by the "donor revolt" that had been spearheaded by Bill Ackman. There are already calls for a restructuring of Harvard Corporation, which is staffed with representatives of the corporate financial elite, and the removing of its presidential search committee head and billionaire Penny Pritzker.

In a revealing op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal*, Christopher Rufo, advisor to the fascistic Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and a leading figure in the campaign to take down Gay, acknowledged that Gay's ouster was achieved through a concerted effort by the media, oligarchs and both parties in Congress. He wrote, "Journalists—including the independent reporter Christopher Brunet and the *Washington Free Beacon's* Aaron Sibarium—applied reputational pressure, exposing Ms. Gay's alleged plagiarism and Harvard's scandalous effort to cover it up. Donors, led by hedge-fund manager Bill Ackman, applied financial pressure, withholding a billion dollars in contributions. And Congress, under the leadership of Rep. Elise Stefanik (R., N.Y.), applied political pressure, exposing Ms. Gay's equivocations on antisemitism and threatening consequences for inaction."

The role of Ackman in this campaign is a stark testimony to its class character. Ackman, who is now worth an estimated \$4 billion, has made more than half of his fortune in the past four years of the pandemic. He is infamous for going on CNBC to warn that "hell is coming" just before the limited COVID-19 shutdowns, helping to spark a major stock market sell-off in March 2020. As he had bought up stakes in the very companies that he had warned would fail and placed bets on the failure of the market, his hedge fund gained

\$2.6 billion from the crash in just one month. In 2021, Ackman praised the fascistic murderer Kyle Rittenhouse as a "civic-minded patriot," justifying his execution of protesters against police violence as "self-defense."

Since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza, Ackman has played a central role in advocating for a crackdown on pro-Palestinian students at college campuses, especially Harvard University, including the doxxing of their names and their blacklisting by major corporations.

These far-right and openly fascist forces rely on the support from the Democratic Party and the Biden White House, which are supplying the weapons for the genocide in Gaza and are supporting the crackdown on democratic rights at home. Without US weapons, Israel would not be able to continue the genocide. US and NATO troops are directly involved in the planning and commissioning of the genocide. The campaign is being carried out in the face of overwhelming opposition. Just this Monday, "Genocide Joe" Biden faced protests for his role in the genocide even at a stage-managed event at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

The US financial oligarchy, whose interests both the Democratic and the Republican Parties serve, has objective interests in this war. In a desperate effort to offset its steep economic decline, US imperialism seeks to re-subjugate the region as part of an emerging imperialist redivision of the world. This global conflict already includes the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine as well as the ongoing preparations for war with China. Both the ongoing class rule of the financial oligarchy, embodied by figures such as Ackman, and the development of an imperialist world war are incompatible with democratic rights. This is what underlies the concerted effort by all factions of the ruling class to eliminate whatever has remained of freedom of speech, including academic freedom, and stifle all opposition to the crimes of US imperialism and its allies in the Middle East.



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