

New York educators horrified by Zionist chemical attack on Columbia University students

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On January 19, Columbia University students were assaulted by two Zionist hoodlums, themselves Columbia students and former members of the Israel Defense Forces. The former IDF soldiers used a chemical spray to attack a pro-Palestinian protest on Columbia's Morningside Heights campus in Manhattan. As of this writing, 10 students have sought medical treatment after being sprayed with what appears to be a noxious substance known as "skunk water."

The Israel Defense Forces has used the substance on Palestinian demonstrators on the West Bank. As *Al-Jazeera* has noted, "Skunk water is a liquid compound with an overpowering odour that has been described by those who have experienced it as the smell of sewage mixed with rotting corpses. In reality, it is a concoction of chemicals that causes intense nausea, obstructing normal breathing, causing violent gagging and vomiting."

This is an accurate description of the substance used on the students, who have since exhibited the same symptoms.

While the Zionist student attackers have been identified and banned from campus, other students have reported seeing them on campus. The university administration has taken no serious disciplinary action, and the New York City police, to whom the incident has been reported, have made no moves to arrest the perpetrators.

Instead, the university blamed the victims in the attack with a news release on Monday that said, "Friday's protest violated University policies and was therefore unsanctioned" and that "these policies exist to maintain personnel on scene for the safety of the community." Sanctioned or not, campus security made no effort to protect anti-genocide protesters from infiltration and harassment by Zionists.

As one victim noted yesterday on Twitter:

What more proof do we need for @Columbia to listen to us? 10 students are hospitalized. Their own employees got skunked. We have photos + videos and eyewitnesses. This stuff could have killed someone. Does one of us have to die before they do anything besides send emails?

As news of the attack spread—primarily through social media and not through mainstream media outlets, which did not report it at first—outrage spread among thousands of students and workers.

In particular, educators throughout New York state, who themselves have been threatened, silenced, doxxed and witch-hunted for opposing the genocide against Palestinians, have expressed anger. Social media posts, however, represent only the tip of the iceberg of disgust at the incident and Columbia's reaction, and at the broader series of attacks on free

speech on campuses, including the forced resignations of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to educators and other workers in New York City and state about the Zionist attack on peaceful protesters. Here is some of what they said:

Mohammad Ahmad, the educator who was witch-hunted by the *New York Post* for his defense of Palestine and opposition to the US/Israeli genocide told the WSWWS:

The impunity with which Zionists engage in violence (and in this case literal terrorism) is buttressed by institutions' facilitation of their victim narrative, despite their being active instigators and oppressors. Columbia, in their victim blaming of student activists, the NYPD, in their foot dragging, and city leadership, in their dehumanization of anti-Zionists, are complicit in this act of violence and the long-term impacts it has on the victims. Columbia has shown distinct bias in its handling of incidents concerning pro-Palestinian students and those concerning Zionists, with a preference for the racist Zionists. What a shameful time for a university that once counted Edward Said among its faculty.

A teacher in Westchester County, New York who wished to remain anonymous said:

Do these Zionists not realize that those who are protesting the genocide of Palestinians today would be the very same ones protesting the genocide of Israelis if the tables were turned? These are people who care about people and about equality and justice for all. It is the brave and outraged defenders of humanity who risk their lives hiding Jews in the attic or African slaves in the safe houses along the Underground Railroad. If we silence these voices, who will come to the rescue next time there's a genocide? And there will be a next time, because there always is.

A teacher from Rockland County who retired because of the government's refusal to stop the spread of COVID-19 in her school asked to remain anonymous:

"I'm appalled. We live in a world of hypocrites and their followers who can't think for themselves and see what is happening so blatantly, right before their eyes.

"All that fuss for Zionist students who don't feel safe because people

are protesting a genocide and calling for freedom for Palestine. People are being physically attacked and it's not even newsworthy. It's all about supporting the acceptable narrative.

I just feel like the [WSWS] article covers it very well. What more can I add other than my reaction and frustration... I have family members whom I barely speak with anymore because they are not interested in context or truth. It's nothing new, I'm afraid. It's just never been this glaring. I'm disgusted about the violence in Yemen now as well, of course.

A middle school teacher in the Bronx told us:

There are no two sides to genocide. Anyone who uses violence to defend violence against a whole people stands on the wrong side of history.

A Brooklyn teacher who asked to be identified only as a Muslim said:

It is remarkably clear that Palestinian and pro-Palestinian allies are not safe in this political climate. Calling for peace, calling for justice, calling for an end to the killing is met with animosity, threats, anti-Arab racism, Islamophobia, and now unprovoked acts of violence. What's worse is that this event has barely registered any outrage, let alone attempts at accountability for the attacks. I have no faith whatsoever that either Mayor Adams, Columbia University President Minouche Shafik, the City Council or the NYPD has any intention of taking meaningful measures to change it.

An educator and librarian in upstate New York said:

As a librarian and writer, I am appalled at the attacks on free speech, protest, and dissent at American universities. The university is supposed to be a place where students are challenged and encouraged to examine ideas. How can the university carry out this function when dissenting speech is suppressed? Still worse are the attacks on students, who should at a minimum be physically safe. Columbia no longer deserves to be considered a great university if it silences dissenting voices and fails to keep its students safe.

A Manhattan educator said:

The shocking news of the chemical attack on peaceful pro-Palestinian protestors at Columbia University on Friday rattled me. In recent months I've seen or participated in protests that made loud noises, expressed strong emotions, even blocked roads to car traffic—but this attack (carried out by former soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, using weapons developed by Israel to target protestors in Palestine) marked a serious escalation.

Zionists have warned that a failure to crack down on and contain Palestinians “over there” will bring terror and war “over here”—yet

that's exactly what they did to peaceful Columbia students. Columbia responded by chiding the victims, calling the protest “unsanctioned” and having “violated” policies.

In October, City Council Member Inna Vernikov illegally displayed a gun, intimidating peaceful pro-Palestinian protestors at Brooklyn College. Vernikov's allies in the NYPD sabotaged the case and caused her charges to be dropped. The message is clear: threats, terror and attacks are allowed against pro-Palestinian protestors, and the system will defend the perpetrators.

Joe Allen, a railway freight worker, said:

I cannot allow myself the comfort of anonymity in the midst of such suffering.

What is most noteworthy for me about the chemical attacks on the students at Columbia University is that this attack was very strategic. While Palestinian protestors have been targeted specifically before, this attack targeted a coalition of student protestors to, of course, silence the protestors. But also to disrupt the unity coalition. It's goal is to isolate, silence, and destroy.

April, a paralegal for a social services agency in New York, told the WSWS:

The chemical attack on the pro-Palestinian student protestors at Columbia University must be condemned in the strongest terms! Over the past several months, we have seen increasingly dangerous language used to describe anyone or any organization that opposes Israel's apartheid policies and its genocidal war against Palestinians as “supporters of terrorism.” On college campuses and elsewhere, those who dissent or have a different perspective on Israel/Palestine not only risk being labeled as antisemitic, but they risk losing internship opportunities, funding for research, their livelihoods or worse. Now these verbal attacks and threats have escalated to violence against protestors.

Our constitutional right to freedom of speech and to peaceably assemble under the First Amendment is in serious jeopardy of being taken away by those who exert their power through wealth and brute force. We must stand in solidarity with the students at Columbia University, and demand the reinstatement of the campus organizations Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace.



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