

Harvard University caving in as “antisemitism” witch-hunt intensifies

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Billionaire donors, right-wing interest groups and fascistic elements in Congress are mounting an assault on academic freedom and democratic rights at Harvard University in an effort to shut down student and faculty opposition to the genocide in Gaza. The attack on Harvard is intended as a spearhead in an effort by capitalists and politicians to undermine higher education and anti-genocide protests across the country.

Harvard leadership has responded with complete spinelessness to these provocations, adapting itself to right-wing pressure. Beginning with the forced resignation of President Claudine Gay, it has facilitated the most reactionary attempts to impose a repressive framework at Harvard.

In an obvious attempt to placate the right wing, the Harvard administration this week promoted John Manning, the conservative head of Harvard’s Law School, to the second highest administration position in the university, naming him university provost.

This puts Manning in position to succeed interim president Alan Garber, the former provost, who has said he will not return to his old position if the Harvard board of regents does not choose him as the permanent replacement for Gay. If Garber were to resign or retire, Manning would then become interim president.

Manning has worked his way up the ladder of right-wing judicial activists. He served as a law clerk first for Appeals Court Justice Robert Bork, then for Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

According to the *Harvard Crimson*, Manning was brought into university leadership at the outset by then-Harvard Law School dean Elena Kagan—who went on to be appointed by Barack Obama to the Supreme Court—to add more “conservative voices” at Harvard.

In 2017, as deputy dean of the law school, Manning was chosen to deliver the “Scalia lecture,” an annual event begun in 2014 to celebrate the ultra-right justice, a Harvard graduate. The occasion in 2017 was the donation of Scalia’s papers to the Harvard Law School archives. Scalia’s widow Maureen and his son Eugene, a Trump administration cabinet official, attended the lecture.

In 2018 Manning became embroiled in a controversy over maintaining the teaching position at Harvard Law School of ultra-conservative Appeals Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh after the latter was elevated to the Supreme Court by Trump. Manning refused to remove Kavanaugh from his teaching position, as demanded by students and alumni at the time. Kavanaugh went on to make a display of right-wing vitriol at his confirmation hearing before

Congress.

The placing of such a right-wing figure in the line of succession to the presidency of the prestigious university is another capitulation to the hysterical right-wing campaign over alleged “antisemitism” on the campus of Harvard and other major universities.

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce, chaired by far-right Republican Virginia Foxx, is demanding Harvard hand over reams of information on “antisemitism,” going back to 2021, by next Monday. This includes potentially thousands of pages of minutes of meetings by Harvard’s administration, documentation on any internal discussions of antisemitism and, ominously, a full count of students and faculty who have participated in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) protest movement. The congressional committee has rejected Harvard’s attempt so far to comply, even though the university has already submitted over 2,500 pages of documentation.

In a hearing held late last year by the committee, Republican Representative Elise Stefanik hounded the presidents of Harvard, MIT and the University of Pennsylvania with denunciations and claims that they were encouraging an antisemitic environment on their campuses.

Both Foxx and Stefanik are proponents of the Great Replacement Theory, an anti-immigrant and antisemitic conspiracy theory that claims Jewish people and left-wing groups are seeking to “replace white people” in Europe and the US with “inferior stock” from South America, Africa and Asia.

The congressional hearing was instrumental in the ouster of Harvard President Claudine Gay in January, orchestrated by a revolt of billionaire donors to the university. The proceedings in Washington are only one front of a wider, well-coordinated campaign to force Harvard into applying repressive measures against the democratic rights and academic freedom of its students and faculty.

The billionaire donor revolt hasn’t stopped with the forced resignation of Gay. These donors, notorious among them Harvard alumnus and hedge fund manager Bill Ackman, are now demanding that the university police its academic life to stop any discussion of “oppressor/oppressed” themes in class, in the words of Ackman, ostensibly because it gives rise to “antisemitism.” This is a particularly acute expression of broader right-wing attacks on higher education, which aim at dismantling political, sociological and social justice teaching and staffing at higher

learning institutions across the country. Harvard has been forced to consider selling billions of dollars' worth of bonds, in large part to make up shortfalls in donor contributions, which constitute 45 percent of Harvard's income.

This now includes the recognition of right-wing pressure groups with the granting of official shared interest group status to the Harvard Jewish Alumni Alliance (HJAA), a Zionist organization.

On January 15, an HJAA delegation traveled to Israel to meet in Tel Aviv with Israeli President Isaac Herzog. The *Boston Globe* wrote of the Zionist group that it spends its time "scouring the school's course offerings, critiquing diversity and inclusion policies, and lobbying top administrators in an attempt to root out what they view as pervasive antisemitism plaguing the university."

A group of about 20 HJAA students and ex-students met with Herzog in Tel Aviv, in what the group called a "solidarity mission," whose purpose, according to the *Times of Israel*, was to "forge deeper connection with Israel and the rich heritage of Judaism, to facilitate cultural exchange and most importantly, to build bridges of understanding and long-term collaboration."

In a glowing account of his meeting with HJAA on Twitter/X, Herzog wrote: "The horrific rise in antisemitism and vocal support for Hamas we have witnessed on campus cannot be tolerated. This isn't about 'freedom of speech,' it's about standing up to hatred & racism."

The *Times of Israel* wrote of the HJAA visit to Israel:

Through visits to the areas directly hit by the Hamas attack on 10/7 and engaging with leading personalities in all areas of the Israeli community—including political, judicial and the IDF [Israel Defense Forces]—the *HJAA Solidarity Mission* provided an opportunity for Harvard alumni to connect with each other and the roots of their heritage in a profound and personal way.

Contrary to the HJAA's professed mission of "pluralistic" cultural exchange, the group's aims are clearly both political and pro-Israel. One of its "action items" is a project to assist in the rebuilding of Kibbutz Kfar Aza, one scene of the October 7 Hamas assault. They are also aiming to bring prominent Israeli figures to Harvard.

As such forces promote their pro-Israeli agenda, on February 29 over 100 Israelis stormed the Erez Crossing at the northern tip of Gaza, in one of the most high-profile attempts since the Israeli war began, aimed at establishing Jewish settlements in Gaza. A small number of settlers, according to +972 Magazine,

managed to cross several hundred meters into Gaza before being intercepted by Israeli soldiers, while around 20 others entered the area between the two walls comprising the barrier that encages the Strip. There, they established an "outpost" in the style seen commonly in the West Bank, building for several hours without the army or

police interfering.

In addition to HJAA's recognition as an official shared interest group by Harvard, the group has acknowledged securing a private audience with Interim President Garber and other top Harvard officials. The HJAA insists on a crackdown on any protests and the acceptance and implementation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism at Harvard, which considers nearly any criticism of the state of Israel synonymous with "antisemitism."

The enemies of academic freedom and democratic rights at Harvard have been encouraged by the university administration's cave-in to right-wing pressure, and its acceptance of the framework of the "antisemitism" witch-hunt. The lack of resistance they have encountered has motivated these forces to press their advantage and has been expanded to other universities. Harvard, as one of the most prestigious universities in the US, is a testing ground for a right-wing wrecking operation against higher education that is already underway across the country. Student and faculty opposition to the genocide in Gaza is to be muzzled and semi-criminalized, setting the stage for inroads into democratic rights on all issues that impinge upon the interests of American capitalism and imperialism.

Harvard students and faculty cannot carry out the struggle against these policies within academia alone. There is no way forward in the fight against the genocide in Gaza through appeals to the ruling class or to any section of the Democratic Party. Students and faculty must turn to the working class and fight for a socialist perspective to organize actions against imperialism and the capitalist system. Students and faculty, by connecting their struggles with that of the working class as a whole, can play an important part in preparing for a political general strike to halt the production and shipment of weapons used by the Israeli government in its assault on Gaza.

Students and faculty at Harvard interested in stopping the Gaza genocide and defending democratic rights must work to form an International Youth and Students for Social Equality club on campus. Contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to exchange information and discuss the organization of meetings and demonstrations.



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