

Interview with a victimized educator

# School authorities, police and media step up harassment of pro-Palestinian educators in New York City

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12 March 2024

Another witch-hunt by Zionists, with the active support of the right-wing media, New York City Public School authorities and the New York Police Department (NYPD), has targeted a pro-Palestinian paraprofessional at an elementary school in Brooklyn.

This comes on top of the doxxing of Queens teacher Mohammad Jihad Ahmad last month when the far-right, pro-Zionist organization Accuracy in Media sent a truck with electronic billboards displaying his image on them to his school. Ahmad and others have been harassed uninterruptedly since October for making statements on social media against the Gaza genocide. Similar trucks have appeared at universities around the country, displaying personal information about anti-Zionist students.

Students in New York City who have protested the genocide in Gaza have been slandered as antisemites, and school authorities have done nothing to defend educators' or students' rights to free speech. New York City Public Schools Chancellor David Banks, an appointee of the right-wing Democratic Mayor Eric Adams, has given the Zionist slaughter his full support. Banks has warned educators not to raise the issue of Palestine even while outside of school, including on social media, which is a direct attack on the First Amendment of the Constitution's guarantee of free speech.

The gutter rag calling itself the *New York Post* has not only repeatedly disclosed personal information about pro-Palestine educators, but has also called for the firing of principals deemed too lax in their suppression of anti-genocide sentiment among students.

Leaders of Central Education Council 14 (CEC)—a city-sponsored parents' advisory group—have been the target of harassment since CEC 14 called for a ceasefire in Gaza and supported student participation in anti-genocide protests. The harassment, according to *Hellgate*, includes “threatening phone calls, emails, and even ... a box addressed to the head of the all-volunteer council that contained what they believed to be human feces. Some parent leaders have also received death threats.” A member of another CEC in Queens was ousted because of her pro-Palestinian views.

A paraprofessional, James, whose last name has been withheld at his request, was originally targeted by upper-middle-class Zionist

parents, some of whom have ties to the upper echelons of the Israel Defense Forces, when he spoke in November in defense the leadership of CEC 14 at one of its public meetings. In discussions with the WSWWS, he detailed the campaign of harassment, which has included articles in the *New York Post* that give his full name and the school at which he works, and make untrammelled accusations of anti-Semitism against him.

On Tuesday, after a fourth disciplinary hearing because of his social media posts, he was suspended from work without pay for ten days.

James explained that the CEC meeting which he attended in November “was a very volatile meeting and when it was time for public comments, I was able to give my statement of support for the CEC, for its president and what it stands for. Within that meeting there were a bunch of parents from my school community but also from across the city and from across the district. I did openly say I was an educator in District 14, so you know it's not hard for them to figure out what school I work at.”

After the meeting, James's social media came under scrutiny from Zionist and right-wing forces, and a behind-the-scenes slander campaign against him began.

“I found out recently that emails from parents were going out to my admin about my statements, saying that I'm calling for the murder of their Jewish children, that they were adamant to keep me away from their kids because of that and I'm not a safe person to be around.”

James continued: “My admin has never once sat down with me to talk about this and has never once mentioned this or brought this up to me. Then on December 5th the New York City Parent Alliance [a recently formed Zionist group] created a leaflet with my name and my occupation, and included screenshots of my posts.

“They called me antisemitic. They said I should not be working with kids and that I am calling for the death of Jewish people. Then an e-mail campaign began with an e-mail, prepared beforehand, and sent to my boss, to my superintendent, to the chancellor and to elected officials, calling for my removal from the classroom because I had made antisemitic remarks such as calling

Israel a settler colonial nation and things of that nature.

“Shortly after that, the cops visited my school around dismissal to talk to me and basically putting the onus on me by saying that because of my outspokenness on social media, these were threats. That was jarring.

“Around December 13th I was called into my first disciplinary meeting and in that meeting my boss had a stack of screenshots and told me that I need to watch my tone on social media, to not use incendiary, one-sided language. She pointed out that terms like ‘genocide,’ ‘colonialism,’ ‘imperialism’ or phrases like ‘from the river to the sea’ were alienating our school community and making people feel unsafe and uncomfortable.

“I told my boss that all of this was done outside of my work hours. I told her that if these concerns were so great and people do feel this way, that I would appreciate being pulled into a conversation with them. I don’t know why I have to wait for a disciplinary meeting to hear these things, where I can’t really defend myself.

“My boss told me that there are just some things that I shouldn’t be too loud about, that I shouldn’t really speak up about, because it draws that kind of negative attention. That just took me aback and I think it was at that moment I realized that the administration does not have my back at all. My mind boggled because I’ve been at the school for eight years and in those eight years, I’ve had nothing but a clean record. My work ethic speaks for itself, and I have great relationships with students, staff and families.

“Before February break, I was suspended for three days without pay. This once again was relating to social media posts. [Zionist] parents created an uproar, and I was informed by other colleagues who were in e-mail chains that the parents who reached out were again saying that I was calling for the murder of their children and to keep me away from their kids because I am not a safe person, and that the keffiyeh that I’m wearing is equivalent to a swastika.”

We asked James if the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), of which he is a member, had defended him.

“They haven’t done much,” he said. “I haven’t really heard from my district rep although I know that my union rep in my school building has reached out. I don’t feel like my union at large is really doing anything. They haven’t really spoken up about the targeted harassment against other union members. For me I don’t feel like they’re doing anything at all. At this point so much harm has been caused.”

For the most part, James’s colleagues have been intimidated by the Zionist frenzy and collaboration of the administration. “I am wearing my keffiyeh so they know that I am pro-Palestinian, but they’ve seen the backlash like the harassment that I’ve been receiving and they’re very wary of raising their voices. I actually did have a colleague who went up to my bosses and said that they were very concerned for my safety because some of the parents have been very vocal.

“On Friday a group of parents who were in support of me came together to be out [in front of the school] because last week I was brought into my fourth disciplinary meeting.

“I’m definitely in a position to get my story out there because right now the narrative is really being loudly shaped by these violent racist Zionists and amplifying my own story is what’s

going to really help shift that narrative and stop the harm that it’s causing.

“I think what the New York City Public Schools are doing—at every level, from principals to superintendents to the chancellor to the mayor—is highly concerning and it’s opposed to people’s First Amendment rights. I would just say that harassment, doxxing, intimidation or silencing will not work.

“As educators we have a moral obligation and the moral duty and responsibility to stand up and speak for marginalized communities and for oppressed peoples not just here in New York City or in the United States but globally.

“I will continue to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine. I will continue to stand for the dismantling of the Israeli state. I will continue to stand for a time when Palestine will be free.

“There are more of us united in this than ever before and we shouldn’t fear the harassment. All of this is scary but I think what’s scarier is staying silent in the face of the genocide.”

Educators and students are subjected to a vicious government-facilitated campaign by Zionists and the far right. It is time to call a halt.

The UFT and the national union to which it is affiliated, the American Federation of Teachers, headed by the pro-Israel millionaire Randi Weingarten, will do nothing to protect the rights of its members. It is time for independent action by the thousands of educators in New York City to defend democratic rights, which will strike a blow for the whole international working class against the Democratic-Republican policy of war and genocide.

There is no time to waste. Educators who want to fight back should contact the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee immediately.



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