

New York City universities step up purge of pro-Palestinian faculty

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The victimization of academics opposed to the US-backed genocide in Gaza has intensified in recent weeks, with two New York City universities at the forefront of the assault on democratic rights.

The city's most elite institution, Columbia University, notified Dr. Abdul Kayum Ahmed, an assistant professor teaching human rights at Columbia, that his appointment would not be renewed. Across town, at John Jay College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, administrators similarly sent notice to long-time professor Danny Shaw that he would be denied reappointments in the summer and fall.

Both firings came in response to Zionist witch-hunt campaigns and are clear instances of politically motivated retaliation for speaking out in defense of the Palestinians. They are part of the broader suppression of widespread opposition to genocide on college campuses in New York and across the US, building on the expulsion of students at Columbia and elsewhere, the disaffiliation of student clubs, and the banning of protests around the country and internationally.

At Columbia, the decisive development in the decision to fire Ahmed was a hit-piece in the *Wall Street Journal* on March 8, insinuating that the lecturer indoctrinated students with pro-Palestinian propaganda. The *Journal* failed to provide any substance to back up the claim, instead ominously positing that “lectures delivered by professors perceived by some students to support the Palestinian cause are adding to the campus tensions over the war and the resulting hostility aimed at Jewish students.”

Such claims turn reality inside out. Supposedly it is not Israel's ongoing ethnic cleansing operation that is adding to “tensions,” but opponents speaking out against it. Meanwhile, attacks by Zionists and former Israel Defense Forces soldiers on pro-Palestinian students, like the chemical attack in January that sent at least 10 protesters to the hospital, have gone unpunished by the university administration. Likewise, Columbia professor and prominent Zionist attack dog Shai Davidai has been given free rein to doxx, bully and otherwise abuse students who oppose Israel's crimes.

Three days after the *Journal* piece appeared, Ahmed was hauled before the vice dean and told he would no longer teach the human rights module, part of Columbia's core curriculum,

because he supposedly portrayed Israel as a settler colonial state in an “unbalanced” way. The professor was subsequently served another letter of non-renewal for his elective course, Health and Human Rights Advocacy.

In dismissing Ahmed, the Columbia administration—and by extension, the American ruling class as a whole—is revealing the true character of their frequent invocation of human rights. For the billionaires that comprise Columbia's board of trustees as well as the politicians in Washington, “human rights” is a propaganda tool to be used against targets of US imperialism. Yet, in the face of the most horrific war crime of the 21st century, any principled exposure of human rights abuses by the US and its allies is cause for censorship and firing.

The actions by Columbia have triggered a campaign to defend Ahmed against the victimization. Multiple petitions by Columbia faculty and the broader Columbia community are circulating to demand his immediate reinstatement. A student-led petition explains:

The removal of Dr. Ahmed from his teaching positions is an example of a much larger and growing pattern of **censorship against academics who discuss Palestine in the classroom**. A recent study shows that of 936 US-based academic scholars on the Middle East, 82 percent said they self-censor when they speak professionally about the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with 81 percent of those holding back criticism of Israel. These threats to academic freedom foster an inability and unwillingness to engage in topics deemed too controversial and too complicated in the classroom. It is all too clear that Dr. Ahmed's removal from the Core has nothing to do with the suitability of his teaching, but with Columbia's discomfort with free expression when it comes to the issue of Palestine.

In the CUNY system, a witch-hunt led by the Zionist doxxing and blacklisting operation Canary Mission led to the firing of Danny Shaw, an adjunct lecturer at John Jay College for 18 years. As is typical in attempts to suppress opposition to

genocide, the organization scoured social media and falsely equated Shaw's comments opposing Zionism with antisemitism. They also absurdly suggested that defending Palestinian resistance is "support for terrorism."

Shaw last week reported receiving a letter of non-reappointment after the college president, Karol Mason, overruled a decision of the Department of Latin American and Latinx Studies to reappoint him. As a letter on behalf of faculty at the Economics Department at John Jay stated, Mason's action "is well outside the historical and ideological norms of John Jay as an institution." The letter further explained, "Karol Mason's action of non-reappointment over a tweet violates principles of academic freedom and constitutionally protected freedom of speech and creates an atmosphere of fear in the college where one can lose their job for unpopular speech."

Shaw is the second CUNY professor to be fired for speaking out against the genocide. Last November, Hunter College dismissed adjunct lecturer Lisa Hofmann-Kuroda following a student complaint about a pro-Palestinian tweet.

As with Columbia, there is significant opposition among faculty and students to the firings at the CUNY system. In addition to the John Jay Economics Department letter, there is a petition and email campaign to demand the reinstatement of Shaw and Hoffmann-Kuroda, as well as a planned protest this week.

The firings have coincided with other attacks on democratic rights at CUNY, including crackdowns on campus protests, the cancellation of pro-Palestinian events, and, at Queens College, the administration reporting the Muslim Association to the New York Police Department for social media posts countering the lies used to justify Israel's genocide.

The intensification of these anti-democratic measures is taking place around the country and internationally. This week, Jodi Dean, a professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York was placed on leave for her pro-Palestinian comments.

At the University of Michigan, administrators are moving forward with a new policy which would effectively ban all campus protests under threat of expulsion and arrest.

Indeed, there is an increasing attempt to go beyond administrative action and criminalize protest and other expressions of opposition to the crimes of US imperialism and its allies. Students have been evicted and expelled from universities and the presidents of two of the most prestigious institutions in the country, the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University, were forced to resign following bipartisan witch-hunt hearings in Congress.

The president of Columbia University, Minouche Shafik, will appear before the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce on Wednesday, April 17, to answer bogus charges of a supposed failure to combat "antisemitism" on campus.

Tellingly, according to leaks of the testimony prepared for the hearing, Columbia University plans to highlight its "increased

public safety presence," including coordinating with the FBI and NYPD and bringing in a private security firm.

In Germany last weekend, hundreds of police officers raided a pro-Palestinian conference, shutting down the event and arresting the organizers.

The assault on democratic rights has grown more frantic as six months of war crimes by the Israeli regime, fully supported by the US and other imperialist powers, have become impossible to deny. Israel has already killed more than 40,000 Gazans, injured 77,000, displaced 2 million, and damaged or destroyed virtually the entire civilian infrastructure of Gaza. Israel has denied basic humanitarian aid, triggering famine conditions. Armed with US weaponry, Israeli forces bombed hospitals, schools and aid convoys, and targeted journalists and intellectuals for assassination.

Rafah is the next target in Gaza, while in the West Bank, military and settler attacks have increased. Israeli strikes throughout the Middle East are threatening to provoke a full-scale regional war.

These historic crimes are shattering the legitimacy of the Zionist project and its sponsors in Washington and Europe. The entire political establishment in the US is implicated and deeply hated. But six months of genocide and protests against it has shown that no amount of pleading with the ruling class will alter its course. The attacks on democratic rights on the campuses are an initial indication of the dictatorial methods that will be implemented to achieve the war aims of US imperialism, regardless of popular sentiment.

To stop war and defend democratic rights, a decisive turn must be made to the social force capable of shifting the dynamics—the international working class.



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