

Oppose the campaign to silence opponents of the Gaza genocide on campuses!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) condemns the attacks on opponents of the genocide in Gaza among students and faculty that are now underway across the United States. We demand that all faculty, students and organizations that have been terminated, expelled or suspended be immediately reinstated. The broadest possible support must be mobilized among youth and in the working class to fight for this demand.

Over the past month, universities across the US, including Vanderbilt University in Tennessee and Columbia University in New York City, have arrested, expelled and suspended students for participating in pro-Palestine demonstrations. Faculty have been terminated or placed on leave, including at Columbia University and John Jay College in New York City. In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott has issued an executive order demanding that the state university system “establish appropriate punishments, including expulsion from the institution” for students who oppose the genocide.

On Tuesday, Asna Tabassum, a valedictorian at the University of Southern California, was effectively banned from delivering her planned commencement speech by the university administration after she had voiced opposition to the genocide on her Instagram.

This campaign to censor, intimidate and silence opponents of the genocide is now to be stepped up. A congressional hearing on Wednesday was dedicated primarily to pressuring the administration of Columbia University, which has taken a lead in the attack on democratic rights on campuses, to carry out a full purge of pro-Palestinian faculty and students.

As in previous congressional hearings targeting elite universities, far-right Republicans like Elise Stefanik, an adherent of the antisemitic and white supremacist “Great Replacement Theory,” and Jim Banks, an open defender of the fascist coup attempt of January 6 and ally of the antisemite Marjorie Taylor Greene, were allowed to lead the charge. Most speakers prefaced their remarks by restating the lie that opposition to Zionism constitutes antisemitism. This lie now serves as the main ideological basis for the criminalization of any opposition to fascism, imperialism and capitalism.

Congressman Tim Walberg, who has called for Israel to annihilate Gaza with nuclear weapons, insisted that the

university “discipline” Joseph Massad, a tenured Columbia University professor of Arab politics. Columbia President Nemat Shafik, a former leading official of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Bank of England, responded that Massad was being “investigated”—a fact that the professor had never been informed about until the hearing. When confronted on the university’s hiring of Mohamed Abdou as a visiting professor, Shafik chillingly responded, “He will never work at Columbia again.”

Stefanik and other representatives of Congress named several other faculty members, calling for them to be terminated and for Columbia to revise its hiring procedures. One congressman described a faculty member who opposed the genocide as “lowlife.” Congressman Joe Wilson (Republican-South Carolina) called for censorship of faculty and students who hold that capitalism is “a system of economic oppression.”

The representatives of Columbia University’s administration, which included a former Goldman Sachs executive, a former leading CNN, ABC and NBC journalist, and a member of the right-wing Federalist Society of lawyers, bent over backwards to try to prove to Congress that they were worthy allies in the attack on free speech.

Shafik declared that the university was “in regular contact with the NYPD and the FBI” and that further “disciplinary actions” would be taken against dissenting students and faculty.

The university has already suspended the Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace and has all but banned demonstrations on its campus. As the hearing was being held, the New York City Police Department had barricaded the entrance to Columbia’s campus, where students had initiated a protest camp on the lawn to demand an end to the genocide.

The hearing made clear that the goal of the US ruling class is nothing less than a purge of the faculty and student body at universities, in order to completely subordinate higher education to the war machine. Everyone who dares voice opposition to US foreign policy is to be thrown out, blacklisted and made the public target of attacks by Zionists and far-right elements.

Such attacks are already taking place. At Columbia University, student protesters had to be hospitalized after being attacked with chemical weapons by former IDF (Israel Defense

Forces) soldiers on campus. In the past two weeks alone, two Muslim youth were attacked on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, and a member of UC Berkeley's law faculty physically assaulted a Muslim student protester.

In an open incitement of vigilante violence against protesters, on Tuesday, far-right Republican Tom Cotton encouraged "people who get stuck behind the pro-Hamas mobs blocking traffic" to "take matters into your own hands. It's time to put an end to this nonsense."

The Democratic Party is fully complicit in this campaign. The policy of the Biden administration has been to close ranks with far-right Republicans for a united front to wage war both abroad and at home. While it works closely with Republicans to abolish free speech on campuses, the Democratic Party relies on the trade union bureaucracies to stifle any independent expression of working class opposition to the attack on democratic and social rights, as well as to war and the Gaza genocide.

Both are part of the same strategy: From the standpoint of the ruling class, the suppression of the class struggle and political opposition at home is the most important precondition for the waging of war abroad.

In this strategy, the Biden administration receives critical support from "left" Democrats. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has emerged as the main fundraiser for the reelection campaign of "Genocide Joe," while remaining silent on the purge of faculty and students. Similarly, *Jacobin*, the flagship journal of the Democratic Socialists of America, maintained silence on the witchhunt on the campuses for months before legitimizing the far-right campaign that led to the ouster of Claudine Gay as president of Harvard University.

This attack on democratic rights is international in scope. On Friday, police in Berlin, Germany raided a Palestine Congress event. Prominent academics and politicians, including the former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, were banned from entering Germany and even speaking to German audiences online. After two world wars and the Holocaust, German imperialism, like the US, France and Britain, is now providing critical funds and weapons for Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Underlying the escalating attack on free speech internationally by all sections of the ruling class is the broadening and intensification of an emerging world war. Over the past week, the US and the European imperialist powers have moved closer than ever to direct conflict with Iran in the Middle East. In Europe, NATO is discussing the deployment of troops to Ukraine, where its proxy forces of the Ukrainian army are facing a disastrous situation in the war against Russia. The two theaters of war are intrinsically linked: Both are part of a new imperialist redivision of the world, which is targeting not only Russia and Iran, but also China.

With its frantic campaign to stifle any opposition to the genocide in Gaza, the ruling class is seeking to preempt the

emergence and prepare the violent suppression of an even wider and more powerful mass movement against war and against capitalism. It is keenly aware that the protests against the Gaza genocide are only a harbinger of such a movement. This is why it is waging once again what the American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon described during the McCarthyism of the early 1950s as "a psychological war against free thought and dissenting opinion on a scale that goes far beyond its legal suppression."

But everything indicates that the ruling class is already losing this "psychological war." The very fact that the protesters have remained defiant in the face of a frontal assault by the state is symptomatic of a far broader process of radicalization: In the eyes of millions, the capitalist system, and especially US imperialism, which has long functioned as its principal bulwark, have lost all historical, political and moral legitimacy.

But no matter how committed and brave they are, young people on their own cannot stop the genocide, fight against imperialism or overthrow the capitalist system. In fact, the experience of the protests over the past half-year shows that a new political and social orientation is urgently needed.

So far, the protests have been dominated by middle-class nationalist forces such as the neo-Stalinist Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and tendencies like Socialist Alternative that are oriented toward the presidential election campaign of the professional opportunist and pragmatist Cornel West.

These tendencies seek to promote the illusion that pressure from below on the Biden administration and the Democratic Party can force the ruling class to "change course." This perspective is a dead end. The bitter lesson of the anti-war movements of the past—be it against the war in Vietnam or the Iraq War—is that any movement that is subordinated to the Democratic Party and limited to the framework of middle-class protest politics will inevitably collapse and be manipulated by the bourgeoisie.

But the 20th century also holds another lesson: The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, which brought the beginning of the end of World War I, and the entire history of the Trotskyist movement demonstrate that the fight to defend democratic rights and the fight against war can only succeed if they are rooted in an independent movement of the working class. This is why the IYSSE insists that a new, socialist anti-war movement must be built, with a clear orientation to the program and theory of revolutionary Marxism and the mobilization of the international working class as the principal revolutionary force in society.



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