

Republican House Speaker Johnson stages provocation at Columbia University, demands repression of protests

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Terrified that the growing student protests against the genocide in Gaza will develop into a larger movement against imperialist war, the Biden administration, both big business parties, and even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are coordinating anti-democratic and authoritarian attacks on the protests.

Following threats Tuesday night from the university to deploy the New York National Guard against students, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (Republican-Louisiana) traveled to the school Wednesday and demanded the resignation of Columbia university President Minouche (Nemat) Shafik for not sufficiently squashing the protests with state violence.

Johnson's appearance at the school in front of protesters, coupled with his demand that protests be shut down, was a calculated provocation. As the Speaker of the House, Johnson is second in the presidential line of succession after Vice President Kamala Harris.

Johnson was joined by several other Republican legislators, including New York Representatives Nicole Malliotakis, Mike Lawler and Anthony D'Esposito, along with Virginia Foxx, Chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor. As chair of the committee, Foxx, alongside New York Representative Elise Stefanik, has spearheaded the witch-hunt against university presidents who have tolerated any protests against the Israeli genocide.

All of the Republicans present at Columbia on Wednesday voted to provide \$26.4 billion for the Israeli military. Three of the Republicans—Johnson, Malliotakis and Foxx—voted to overturn the 2020 election following the January 6 attack on Congress.

All the Republicans present at Columbia have also

embraced Trump's Hitler-inspired attacks on immigrants, including by voting to impeach Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. Despite deporting more migrants than Trump, House Republicans advanced "Great Replacement Theory" (GRT) arguments to justify impeaching Mayorkas, who is Jewish. GRT, which has been embraced by virtually the entire Republican Party, posits that Jewish groups and Democrats are trying to "flood" the United States with non-white people from South America, Africa and Asia.

In his opening comments, Johnson, a Christian nationalist who advocates for a national abortion ban, the Bible to be taught in history class and that non-heterosexual relationships are "inherently unnatural," lamented that "the cherished traditions of this university are being overtaken right now by radical extreme ideologies.

"Columbia has allowed these lawless agitators and radicals to take over," Johnson snarled as his comments were met with an unending chorus of boos and jeers from protesters.

The Speaker then repeated the "big lie" that the anti-war protests, which have large contingents of Jewish students, are antisemitic. Johnson claimed, without evidence, that the peaceful protests at Columbia and other universities had "placed a target on the back of Jewish students," and therefore, "allowed the virus of antisemitism to spread to other campuses."

Johnson not only attacked students but also went after professors and faculty for "shamefully" joining "the mobs." Johnson blamed "professors" and "some public officials" for refusing to endorse and propagate Israeli lies about October 7.

The Speaker concluded his remarks by calling for “arrests” and for President Shafik to “immediately resign” if she “could not bring order to his chaos.”

Following Johnson, Rep. Foxx echoed his authoritarian statements. She bemoaned an imaginary “explosion” of “antisemitism” on Columbia’s campus and accused Shafik of lying to Congress by referring to a previous attack on Palestinian students by former IDF soldiers, which Foxx, in a blatant lie, said was “made up.”

Speaking directly to Shafik, Foxx declared “the inmates are running the asylum. Take back control of this once great institution.” Referring to Shafik previously calling in riot police to conduct mass arrests of peaceful student protesters Foxx stated, “You took action last week; it’s time to act again.”

Johnson’s demand for repression is entirely in line with the position of the Biden administration and the Democrats, who have likewise slandered the protests as antisemitic and backed the mass arrest of students.

On his official Twitter/X account, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu backed the efforts to demonize student protests. Netanyahu said that “antisemitic mobs have taken over leading universities. ... This is reminiscent of what happened in German universities in the 1930’s.”

Netanyahu called for the protests to be “stopped,” adding “more has to be done.”

While the entire Republican New York House delegation, and now, Speaker Johnson, has called on Shafik to resign, on Sunday, Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman became the first Democratic senator to call for her ouster. Writing on his Twitter/X account, Fetterman endorsed Biden’s false characterization of the anti-genocide protests as “antisemitic, unconscionable, and dangerous.”

“Add some tiki torches, and it’s Charlottesville for these Jewish students,” Fetterman added, disgustingly drawing an equal sign between a neo-Nazi rampage that ended in the murder of anti-racist activist Heather Heyer, with dozens of peaceful protests calling for an end to war and divestment from an apartheid state.

Like the bipartisan vote for the supplemental military package earlier this week, the “bipartisan” gang-up on student protesters by Democrats, Republicans and Netanyahu, underscores that there is no fundamental difference or “lesser evil” between the capitalist

parties. In order to prosecute imperialist war in Gaza, Ukraine and soon China, both the Democrats and Republicans will employ smears and state-backed violence in order to suppress opposition to their warmongering agenda.



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