

Columbia University removes three administrators on bogus charges of antisemitism

John Conrad, Tim Avery
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) demands the immediate reinstatement of the three Columbia University administrators removed from their positions in late June on bogus charges of antisemitism. The removals are the latest in an international crackdown on free speech on college and university campuses aimed at intimidating opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The three administrators—Vice Dean and Chief Administrative Officer Susan Chang-Kim, Dean of Undergraduate Student Life Cristen Kromm, and Associate Dean for Student and Family Support Matthew Patashnick—were targeted after an unidentified photographer, sitting behind the administrators, took pictures of text messages exchanged between them during a panel discussion titled “Jewish Life on Campus: Past, Present and Future” at Columbia on May 31.

The panel event featured Columbia Law School dean emeritus, David Schizer, who was one of three chairs overseeing Columbia’s Task Force on Antisemitism; director of the Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life, Columbia/Barnard Hillel, Brian Cohen; dean of Columbia’s Earl Hall Center for Religious Life, Ian Rottenberg; and Columbia undergraduate and Deputy News Editor of the *Columbia Spectator*, Rebecca Massel.

In the text messages, the administrators respond frankly to the panel, which was a propaganda event intended to appease the witch-hunters in Congress and promote the lie that opposition to Zionism is equivalent to antisemitic hate speech.

The texts amount to little more than an exercise in basic critical thought. Patashnick writes, “His use of the word Hamas is interesting. Students generally weren’t protesting for Hamas.” Chang-Kim asks, “Did we really have students kicked out of clubs for being Jewish?” Patashnick responds, “To my knowledge no one was actively kicked out.”

When Chang-Kim objects to “Painting our students as

dangerous,” Patashnick responds, “He knows exactly what he’s doing and how to take full advantage of this moment. Huge fundraising potential.” In a message that brings to mind the implementation of segregated housing at NYU, Patashnick writes, “Laying the case to expand physical space! They will have their own dorm soon.”

In texts that the far right have claimed are particularly antisemitic, Chang-Kim writes, “Comes from such a place of privilege... hard to hear the woe is me, we need to huddle at the Kraft center.” Kromm responds, “Blind to the idea that non-Israel supporting Jews have no space to come together,” and later writes, “Amazing what \$\$\$\$ can do.”

These texts have nothing to do with antisemitic tropes and everything to do with social reality: a layer of upper-middle-class Zionists are using the language and methods of identity politics to participate in and profit from the propaganda supporting the genocide in Gaza. The texts have provoked the ire of this layer not because they are antisemitic, but because they tell the truth.

The photographs of the texts were first made public in June by the right-wing news website The Washington Free Beacon. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce proceeded to demand a full transcript of the exchange, which was published on July 2. The deans were put on leave in late June.

Announcing the removal of the three administrators on July 8, University President Nemat Shafik slandered the deans as antisemites, writing, “This incident revealed behavior and sentiments that were not only unprofessional, but also, disturbingly touched on ancient antisemitic tropes.”

Far-right Republican Representative and Chair of the House Committee on Education Virginia Foxx, in a statement to the *Columbia Spectator*, said that the removal of the deans was “not enough.” Demanding a more brutal crackdown on basic democratic rights on university campuses, she continued, “Every rock that this Committee’s investigation turns over is more proof that ‘elite’

institutions are rotting away and antisemitism is as rampant as ever. Students deserve better, and Columbia is far from off the hook.”

Several prominent university alumni, including multi-billionaire hedge fund investor Dan Loeb, have started a petition demanding the immediate removal of Dean of Columbia College Dr. Josef Sorett, who was also involved in the text exchange but has not been removed from his position.

Over the last nine months, the House Committee on Education has spearheaded the witch hunt against university students, faculty and staff opposed to the genocide in Gaza. University administrators from many of the leading academic institutions in the United States have been hauled in front of the Committee to answer for their failure to effectively censor, intimidate and silence opponents of the genocide.

Fascistic representatives like Elise Stefanik, a real antisemite and white supremacist adherent of the “Great Replacement Theory,” and Jim Banks, an open defender of the fascist coup attempt of January 6, 2021 and ally of the antisemite Marjorie Taylor Greene, sit on the Committee and lead the charge against students, faculty and staff. Shafik was questioned at a Committee hearing in April and committed to intensifying the campaign of repression against anti-genocide students and faculty. Administrators at Columbia and other elite academic institutions have bent over backwards to try to prove to Congress that they are reliable allies in the attack on free speech.

In April, Shafik, backed to the hilt by the Democratic Mayor of New York Eric Adams and the Biden administration, sicced hundreds of armed New York City Police Department riot cops on student protesters. Columbia and many other campuses across the US and internationally were turned into armed police camps and hundreds of students and faculty were arrested and injured in police rampages through campus. The administration has also dismissed several faculty members for voicing principled opposition to the genocide and suspended the Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace clubs.

Announcing the removal of the three deans, Shafik also wrote that the university “will launch a vigorous program of antisemitism and antidiscrimination training for faculty and staff this fall, with related training for students under the auspices of University Life.” Students and faculty will be forced to go through an orientation on “antisemitism,” which equates opposition to Zionist barbarism with anti-Jewish sentiment.

The attacks at Columbia are part of a broader offensive by the American ruling class, spearheaded by the Biden administration in alliance with fascist Republicans and far-

right billionaire donors, against any opposition to the war plans of American imperialism, which includes full support for the genocide in Gaza that has killed over 186,000 men, women and children.

The ruling class aims to ensure the complete subordination of higher education to the American war machine. Everyone who dares voice opposition, even the most milquetoast criticism, to US foreign policy is to be expelled, blacklisted and made the public target of attacks by Zionists and far-right elements.

All of this is being carried out under the guise of a fight against “rampant antisemitism.” The lie that opposition to Zionism constitutes antisemitism serves as the main ideological basis for the criminalization of all left-wing opposition to fascism, imperialist war and the capitalist profit system.

Significantly, this offensive has failed to intimidate its main target, the student protesters, and the text messages reveal a university faculty reluctant to be swept up in the barrage of propaganda. The attacks on free speech on the campuses come not from a position of strength, but from a position of weakness.

Thus far, the protests against the Gaza genocide have been dominated by pseudo-left tendencies like the neo-Stalinist Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and Socialist Alternative whose basic perspective—that protests should be contained to pressuring the Democratic Party—is precisely the perspective that led the movements against the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq to defeat and collapse.

But the ruling class is extremely nervous that opposition to the genocide could break free from its present pseudo-left leaderships and inspire a broader movement of the working class against imperialist war.

This break from the Democratic Party and turn toward the working class in the fight for socialism is precisely what the IYSSE is fighting for. Students and young people who want to fight for this perspective should join our demonstration against Netanyahu’s appearance before Congress in Washington D.C. on July 24.



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