

Instagram shuts down accounts of anti-genocide student groups before start of fall classes

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One week before fall semester classes resume, the social media platform Instagram has permanently shut down the accounts of pro-Palestinian organizations on two college campuses in New York City.

On Monday, at Columbia University, Instagram banned the account of Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) without notice or explanation. Columbia is one of the main campuses where mass protests against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza took place during the previous school year, including the establishment of the first of many student Palestine solidarity encampments.

In a post on X, Columbia SJP said, “As the school year is just about to begin, Columbia SJP has been permanently banned from Instagram. Our account was permanently deleted at 124k followers at the same time as our backup account, and when we made a new page it was deleted within 2 days.”

The group published a graphic of the message received from Instagram about the ban which said, “We disabled your account. You no longer have access to sjp.columbia.” It also asserted that the action was taken because “Your account, or activity on it, doesn’t follow our Community Guidelines.”

The Instagram message concluded by stating, “All of your information will be permanently deleted. You cannot request another review of this decision.”

A subsequent statement by the group on X indicated that attempts by the organization to create a new account were taken down by Instagram within hours. SJP Columbia encouraged supporters to post activity on their Telegram account t.me/SJPColumbia.

At New York University (NYU), another center of student protest activity last year against the Gaza

genocide, the account of the campus People’s Solidarity Coalition (PSC) was terminated by Instagram. NYU PSC, a coalition of 44 campus student organizations, was at the center of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment on the NYU campus in Manhattan last school year.

Instagram is a photo and video sharing social media service owned by Facebook-parent Meta Platforms. It has 2 billion worldwide active users, 160 million of whom are in the US. The largest age group of Instagram users, 71 percent or 113 million, is between 18 and 29 years old.

The censorship by Instagram is being carried out against pro-Palestinian student groups alongside of the rollout across the country by university administrations of new campus policies aimed at clamping down on the freedom of expression by students.

Anticipating a renewal and broadening of the student protests, colleges and universities are imposing rules that eliminate the fundamental right to political expression and to place demands upon administrations and impose criminal penalties if the rules are violated.

The criminalization of protest is also being combined with an intensification of the slander that pro-Palestinian demonstrations are “antisemitic.”

At Columbia University, encampments have been totally banned, and fencing has been installed on the grassy areas of the campus quad. At NYU, the administration has updated its discrimination and harassment policy to include a ban on criticism of Zionism by conflating the racist and apartheid political ideology of the state of Israel with Jewish identity.

The right-wing, pro-Israeli hysteria that has been whipped up against protests on college campuses has

led to the resignation of university presidents after they came under attack for failing to put a stop to the student movement.

On August 14, Columbia University President Minouche (Nemat) Shafik resigned even though she led a brutal police state-style crackdown on anti-genocide and pro-Palestinian student protesters last April. She was the third Ivy League president to resign over the past eight months after coming under attack by fascist Republicans in Congress.

Meanwhile, right-wing and pro-Israeli defenders of the Gaza genocide, in which more than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, are demanding that the US Justice Department investigate SJP for violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

For example, the Shurat HaDin–Israel Law Center is calling on Attorney General Merrick Garland to bring FARA charges against SJP for being agents of Hamas with alleged ties to terrorists in Gaza.

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, president and founder of the law center, sent a letter to AG Garland that stated, “SJP is nothing more than the unregistered student wing of a foreign terrorist organization. They are Hamas’ chaos agents in the United States.”

These slanders are being made because campus groups such as SJP and other organizations, including Jews for Ceasefire and Jewish Voice for Peace, express the widespread opposition that exists among students, faculty and campus workers to the US-backed Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

The censorship intervention by Instagram against SJP Columbia and NYU PSC is being orchestrated by the billionaire tech elites and the Biden White House in an effort to silence the growing student movement against the ethnic cleansing by Israel in Gaza.



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