

New York University faculty and staff group announces limited strike action to oppose criminalization of anti-Zionism

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A group of faculty and staff at New York University (NYU) in Manhattan has announced its intention to withhold administrative tasks for the fall semester starting on Labor Day, September 2, until the university ceases its attacks on free speech on campus, specifically on students and staff opposed to the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

The action was announced in the aftermath of NYU's release of updates to its discrimination and harassment policies that prohibit any criticism of Zionism, directly conflating this ultra-nationalist, ethno-centrist and racist political ideology and Judaism and labeling such criticism as a discriminatory act.

The university's new guidelines read, "For many Jewish people, Zionism is a part of their Jewish identity. Speech and conduct that would violate the NDAH (non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy) if targeting Jewish or Israeli people can also violate the NDAH if directed toward Zionists." Anyone "identifying" as a "Zionist" is placed under a category of a "protected class," which shields them from being subject to "discriminatory comments."

According to the legal advocacy group Palestine Legal, responding to NYU's new policies on X/Twitter, "This is the first university, that we are aware of, that claims that Zionist is an identity meriting protection under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, rather than a political ideology used to justify apartheid and genocide."

NYU's updated guidelines are part of an intensifying state-led effort by both parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, to slander, suppress and outlaw all left-wing criticism of the Zionist state, and imperialist war and capitalism, more broadly. New York Democrat Ritchie Torres, a heavy promoter of identity politics, endorsed the new guidelines on Twitter/X, calling upon universities across the country to emulate NYU's example.

Zionism, a nationalist political ideology that emerged in the 19th century in reaction against the program of socialist internationalism, has never represented the interests of the

masses of Jewish workers and youth. Based in privileged sections of the Jewish middle class and bourgeoisie, the concept of the formation of a Jewish state was directed against the socialist program of the international solidarity of the working class that was steadily gaining ground among masses of Jewish workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The equation of Zionism with Jewish identity is belied by the fact that, in the past year, millions of Jews around the world have been centrally involved in the protests and rallies against the genocidal war waged by the Zionist state against the Palestinian people. Jewish students, youth and workers have been brutalized and thrown in jail in the US, Germany, the UK, France and Israel itself and other countries for opposing the systematic slaughter of Palestinians and the association of Judaism with mass murder.

On Sunday, the NYU chapter of the Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (NYU FSJP) released a statement condemning the university's updated policies. The group writes, "The new guidance sets a dangerous precedent by extending Title VI protections to anyone who adheres to Zionism, a nationalist political ideology, and troublingly equates criticism of Zionism with discrimination against Jewish people."

They continued, "This is a disturbing development that will legitimize far-right and ethnonationalist ideologies under the guise of protecting students from racial discrimination. This weaponization of the Title VI apparatus openly threatens the university's commitments to academic freedom and to nondiscrimination, and we insist that the administration reconsider these changes for the good of the university community."

The NYU FSJP published an online pledge earlier this week, titled "WE REFUSE," announcing the limited strike action of faculty and staff, which declares:

"We believe university leadership has forsaken the principles of academic freedom and institutional

responsibility. ... Until the NYPD is removed permanently from our campus, speech and assembly are fully protected, and all disciplinary measures against pro-Palestinian advocates have been dropped, we refuse to conduct business as usual. This campaign, which has already drawn the support of numerous faculty and staff across the university, will involve the refusal of service and DEI work, and it will include interruption of a variety of internal and public-facing NYU events.”

The new guidelines by NYU are part of a broader offensive against free speech on university and college, and high school, campuses. Defending the interests of the American financial and corporate oligarchy and the military-intelligence apparatus, university administrations are in the process of converting campuses into armed fortresses criminalizing protests and restricting student movement. At NYU, heavy security and NYPD are now part of the regular presence on campus, with almost all common areas heavily guarded or locked down entirely so as to prevent any gatherings of students and academic workers.

The ruling class, terrified of opposition spreading into the working class more broadly, is determined to put students “in their place” following 10 months of continuous, courageous opposition to the Gaza genocide among millions of students and youth, who have defied police repression, punishments by administrators and the blacklisting of anti-genocide protesters.

It is not the first time that the NYU administration is taking the lead in stepping up the bogus “anti-antisemitism” campaign, which for many years has formed the spearhead of the attack on democratic rights and the criminalization of left-wing opposition on campuses in the US and internationally. In 2020, NYU adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s reactionary 2016 definition of antisemitism, which describes criticism of Israel and of Zionism as inherently antisemitic.

Run by Democratic and Republican operatives, corporate and financial oligarchs and military officials, and heavily funded by the American state and military-intelligence apparatus, the university administration not only plays a central role in the recruitment of personnel and development of military-intelligence hardware but is also forming the spearhead in suppressing domestic opposition to war.

Over the last 10 months, the crackdown on anti-genocide protests at NYU, as well as Columbia University, has been particularly ferocious. Numerous NYU students, faculty and staff have been blacklisted, doxxed and removed from their positions. The administration sicced heavily armed New York City Police Department riot squads on student and faculty protesters during the fall semester, resulting in the arrest and injury of hundreds of students and staff. Across

the country, thousands were arrested, and many more were injured as riot police rampaged through college campuses.

This intensifying assault on free speech illustrates the ever more central role played by universities in the war drive of US imperialism. Over the last several decades, the universities have been transformed into massive financial entities run by Wall Street and the capitalist state. As a result, all the major academic institutions are deeply integrated into the apparatus of the capitalist state. Massive sums of money are pumped by the Department of Defense into leading universities for technological development, personnel recruitment and ideological propaganda. University administrations are packed with Wall Street executives, former CIA and Pentagon officials and operatives of the Democratic and Republican parties.

This is why, when protesting against the genocide on campus, students, faculty and staff are immediately confronted with the full force of the American capitalist state. Fundamentally, the campaign against free speech on the campuses is an attack on the basic democratic rights of the entire working class. It is meant to pave the way for even more violent measures against any attempt by the working class to oppose war and the escalating attacks on its social and democratic rights.

The experience of the past 10 months underscores that all efforts to oppose war, genocide and the attacks on democratic rights through appeals to the university administrations and the Democratic Party only end in isolation, demoralization and failure.

Instead, students, faculty and staff must turn outward to the only social force that can take on this enemy—the international working class in the struggle against capitalism. The strike action taken by NYU faculty and staff, coming after the political strike of tens of thousands of academic workers in the University of California system last semester, is an important step in that direction. However, it must be broadened to other campuses and, most critically, to other sections of the working class, and armed with a perspective aimed at the independent mobilization of the international working class against genocide and the emerging world war, and its root cause—the capitalist system.



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