

Right wing groups in California use bogus claims of antisemitism to launch legal attacks on education and free speech

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A series of lawsuits have been launched by pro-Zionist outfits against California teacher unions and school districts both prior to and after the Israeli regime launched their overt genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people last year. The lawsuits are an attempt to stifle opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state backed by Washington.

Leveraging the slander that all classroom discussion of the crimes of the Israeli government is “antisemitic,” some of the suits also seek to remove automatic union membership in the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union, falsely claiming that the union promotes antisemitism.

While one of the most prominent of these lawsuits was recently thrown out by a U.S. District judge, others are still ongoing and may gain traction as a result of not only the anti-democratic climate of the incoming Trump administration but also as a result of recent pro-Zionist measures passed by the Democratic Party-led state government meant to severely limit, if not altogether suppress, discussion of the ongoing genocide and the crimes of US imperialism in general.

The recently tossed lawsuit was launched by a group calling itself the Concerned Jewish Parents and Teachers of Los Angeles. It opposes the teaching of the so-called Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

The lawsuit sought to shut down any criticisms of Israeli policy as “antisemitic.” It claimed that the LAUSD-UTLA Ethnic Studies Committee and UTLA president Cecily Myart-Cruz encouraged the adoption of a curriculum that “condemns capitalism, white privilege and Zionism” and characterized Israel’s existence as “based on ethnic cleansing and land theft, apartheid and genocide.”

District Judge Fernando Olguin’s ruling dismissed the suit with prejudice as he claimed the complaint was “difficult to understand and contains a morass of largely irrelevant—and sometimes contradictory—allegations, few of which state with any degree of clarity precisely what plaintiffs believe defendants have done or, more importantly, how plaintiffs

have been harmed.”

The legal director for the Deborah Project, a pro-Israeli law firm created specifically for the purpose of preventing criticism of Israel in school settings and which represented the plaintiffs, responded to the ruling stating, “We absolutely will be appealing the decision and are confident that the decision will be reversed on appeal.” The deadline for the appeal is December 30.

Other, similar lawsuits are still ongoing.

In the nearby Santa Ana Unified School District in Orange County, lawyers with the American Jewish Committee and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights under Law are asking the Orange County Superior Court to eliminate four ethnic studies courses taught in the district, largely on the basis of a technicality. The suit alleges that the curriculum was passed in a closed-door school board meeting, which would be in violation of the Brown Act mandating open meetings with advance public notice.

It also alleges that antisemitic remarks were made by curriculum steering committee members who said of members of the Jewish Federation of Orange County that they “benefit from White privilege and so have it better. We don’t need to give both sides. We only support the oppressed, and the Jews are the oppressors.” Such allegations should be taken with a heavy grain of salt as they are not taken from recorded quotes but are instead paraphrased recollections by one of the plaintiffs.

Responding to the suit, the Santa Ana district released a statement that it “denies these claims and will present counterarguments and facts to the Court for consideration and is optimistic that the Court will ultimately find in favor of the district.”

Another lawsuit filed against both the California Public Employee Relations Board and the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) by five Jewish teachers argues that they should not be compelled, as part of their employment, to be part of a teachers union that

“publicly advocates acts violating their deeply held religious beliefs.”

The suit alleges that, as part of the Liberated Ethnic Studies curriculum, the UTLA supports “calls for the destruction of Plaintiff’s religious homeland, and promotes animosity and violence towards people of Jewish descent” but makes no attempt to substantiate these claims, which moreover run contrary to any objective reading of the actual curriculum.

Shella Alcabes, counsel for the Freedom Foundation, a right-wing organization describing itself as a “battle tank” against public employee unions and which sponsored the lawsuit, told *ChalkboardNews* that “UTLA hates Israel. It supports causes, organizations and speech that is anti-Israel, and is really anti-Jewish, but Jewish teachers are forced to be a part of it. This law is unconstitutional because it forces these teachers to be represented by an organization that hates them.”

The fact that the ultimate aim of the lawsuit is rank-and-file opposition to the genocide is indicated by its claim that the five teachers “have been ostracized and excluded by fellow members of their bargaining unit.”

The aim of this campaign is to replace historical knowledge with patriotic mythmaking, placing the crimes of US imperialism beyond criticism and promoting vulgar—and racist—slanders about its targets. They hope to replicate initiatives such as those in the state of Florida where the fascistic governor Ron DeSantis has passed a slate of measures censoring books deemed unacceptable to the political right and placing severe restrictions on school curricula.

Union bureaucrats will cave

While there is mass opposition to this campaign from teachers, students and workers, the union bureaucracy will strive to accommodate themselves to the attack on antiwar and anti-capitalist sentiments.

Resisting such attacks would place them in opposition to the Democratic Party, which itself is working to suppress anti-genocide politics on schools and college campuses, and to the entire political establishment with which they are totally connected. By going after automatic membership in the UTLA, groups like the Freedom Foundation are seeking to focus their attack on the bureaucracy’s financial interests, forcing them to toe the line.

American Federation of Teachers head Randi Weingarten is an arch-Zionist who has supported the war from

beginning, as with all the criminal wars supported by US imperialism. Functioning as a State Department asset, she spends much of her time crisscrossing the world promoting various regime change operations backed by the US.

Her role in forcing the reopening of schools during the pandemic against the opposition of teachers and parents also brought her into alignment with far-right anti-vaxxers who are now being brought into the Trump administration.

Both she and National Education Association head Becky Pringle have come out in support of Trump’s nominee for Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer. The fact that the incoming Trump administration has pledged to dismantle the Department of Education and turn schools into purely workplace training and military recruitment centers has not warranted a word of opposition from either of the two figures.

The UTLA itself, along with teacher unions across the country, is heavily influenced by the politics of the pseudo-left, especially the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), with UTLA president Cecily Myart-Cruz being a member of the group. Although the anti-genocide initiatives of the union have garnered significant press, they seek to demobilize opposition to war by tying workers to the war criminals in the Democratic Party.

In addition to the Ethnic Studies Model curriculum, the UTLA recently championed Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’ fraudulent resolution blocking the sale of arms to Israel, which inevitably resulted in a quick and decisive defeat once brought up for a vote. In reality, Sanders is pro-Zionist and has voted repeatedly throughout his career for military funding for Israel. The union dropped the issue entirely as soon as the measure failed.

The latest lawsuits in California prove that no state or individual school district will be spared from this assault. These attacks can only be opposed through the development of the independence of the working class against the whole political establishment, with workers taking initiative into their own hands and preparing a mass movement through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees.



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