

Trump threatens to pull funding from schools that refuse to suppress free speech, opposition to genocide

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In a direct attack on the democratic rights of the entire working class, President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatened on his social media site to unilaterally “STOP” all federal funding for “any College, School, or University that allows illegal protests.”

Ignoring the First Amendment, Trump wrote:

Agitators will be imprisoned/or permanently sent back to the country from which they came. American students will be permanently expelled or, depending on the crime, arrested.

Trump concluded with a call to ban all facial coverings, writing “NO MASKS!” With this eugenicist demand, Trump is following recent legislative initiatives by both Republican and Democratic politicians that seek to ban the wearing of facial coverings in public, even as COVID-19, measles, influenza and other deadly pathogens continue to spread unchecked throughout the United States.

Trump has no legal authority to force colleges or schools to unilaterally deport or suspend students. Free speech, including objecting to the policies of the US government, is protected under the First Amendment, including at public universities.

With his post, Trump is placing himself above the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and asserting police-state powers to imprison and deport any who voice public opposition to him or his government. If Trump can arrest American citizens and deport foreign students on visas who dissent, what is to stop him from doing this to anyone else, including federal employees who protest illegal firings, or workers who strike against layoffs and the destruction of their wages and social benefits?

Trump feels emboldened to make these threats due entirely to the de facto support he receives from the Democratic Party. During the first year of protests against the Israeli genocide in Gaza, under the Biden administration, over 3,000 people, including students and teachers, were arrested on college campuses and school grounds for calling for an end to the slaughter.

The bipartisan attack on the democratic rights of the working class in the United States has been mirrored by Washington’s imperialist allies around the world, which are similarly seeking to suppress growing opposition among broad layers of the population to imperialist war and inequality.

Underscoring that Trump’s statement is directed against any and all public opposition to the Zionist regime in Israel, which serves as a garrison state for US imperialism in the Middle East, Trump’s nominee as ambassador to the United Nations and current New York Rep. Elise Stefanik reposted Trump’s statement Tuesday and wrote: “Under [Trump], colleges and university will be held accountable.”

Stefanik, falsely equating opposition to a fascistic apartheid government carrying out genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians with hatred of Jewish people, wrote, “Antisemitism and anti-Israel hate will not be tolerated on American campuses. Promises made, promises kept.”

In 2023, Stefanik led the witch-hunt against university presidents from Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Pennsylvania and other colleges and schools where students held demonstrations and encampments in opposition to genocide. While she positions herself as the ultimate defender of the Jewish people, Stefanik is an open promoter of the antisemitic and anti-immigrant “Great Replacement” theory, which has animated several fascist mass shootings in the US and internationally.

Despite her promotion of racist conspiracy theories, Stefanik was welcomed to the Anti Defamation League’s “Never is Now” event held in New York City on March 3-4. While she was booed for claiming Trump would have prevented the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, the *Jewish Telegraph Agency* reported that she received “mostly cheers” from conference attendees “as she promoted President Donald Trump’s record on Israel—from praising his proposal to deport foreign-born anti-Israel students to vowing to ‘dismantle’ the United Nations’ Palestinian aid agency.”

Emphasizing that Trump’s comments are not just idle threats, but the policy of the Trump administration as a whole, the day before Trump’s post, Health and Human Services Secretary

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and recently confirmed Secretary of Education Linda McMahon released a statement titled, in part, “Additional measures to end anti-Semitic harassment on college campuses.”

Targeting Columbia University, which has already expelled three students for participating in protests against the genocide, the statement announced “a comprehensive review of Columbia University’s federal contracts and grants in light of ongoing investigations for potential violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.”

It continued:

Given Columbia’s ongoing inaction in the face of relentless harassment of Jewish students, the Federal Government’s Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism is considering Stop Work Orders for \$51.4 million in contracts between Columbia University and the Federal Government. The task force will also conduct a comprehensive review of the more than \$5 billion in federal grant commitments to Columbia University to ensure the university is in compliance with federal regulations, including its civil rights responsibilities.

Kennedy, an anti-vaccine zealot responsible for fomenting a plague, wrote, “Anti-Semitism—like racism—is a spiritual and moral malady that sickens societies and kills people with lethalties comparable to history’s most deadly plagues.” Kennedy is an ardent Zionist, but this has not stopped him from previously opining that COVID-19 was genetically engineered in a Chinese lab to spare Jewish and Chinese people.

Using a hodgepodge of right-wing buzzwords to concoct a bogus narrative that American universities have turned into breeding grounds for antisemitism, Kennedy claimed that “censorship” and “false narratives of woke cancel culture” had “transformed our great universities into greenhouses for this deadly and virulent pestilence.”

McMahon similarly painted a picture of American universities meant to invoke Germany in the 1930s, declaring:

Americans have watched in horror for more than a year now as Jewish students have been assaulted and harassed on elite university campuses. Unlawful encampments and demonstrations have completely paralyzed day-to-day campus operations, depriving Jewish students of learning opportunities to which they are entitled.

Threatening to suspend funding to Columbia, McMahon concluded:

Institutions that receive federal funds have a responsibility to protect all students from discrimination.

Columbia’s apparent failure to uphold their end of this basic agreement raises very serious questions about the institution’s fitness to continue doing business with the United States government.

There is no question that with the resumption of the blockade and deliberate starvation of the Palestinians in Gaza, a war crime, protests against US support for Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank will continue. On Tuesday, protesters gathered outside Columbia to protest an event that featured former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who previously stated, “I’ve killed lots of Arabs in my life and there’s no problem with that.”

Protests, however, as the last 17 months of genocide have shown, are not enough to stop the killing or protect the democratic rights of students. In a statement published yesterday calling for the reinstatement of expelled Columbia students, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) called “for the development of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which will connect the defense of the interests of workers with the fight against genocide, war and dictatorship.”

It concluded:

The defense of democratic rights and opposition to war can only succeed through the mobilization of the social force capable of challenging the capitalist ruling class—the international working class. This requires a political break from both the Democratic and Republican parties, which, despite their factional differences, are united in their support for genocide, war and dictatorship.



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