

California’s “anti-discrimination,” “antisemitism prevention” bill: A bipartisan assault on democratic rights and public education

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The signing of California Assembly Bill 715 (AB 715) by Governor Gavin Newsom on October 7 marks a milestone in the bipartisan campaign to criminalize political dissent and rewrite history in the service of imperialist policy. The timing of the bill’s signing, two years since the events of October 7 and the beginning of Gaza’s genocide, was no accident.

Passed under the fraudulent banner of “antisemitism prevention,” AB 715 embodies a reactionary fusion of state power, corporate censorship and Zionist ideology. It is part of a nationwide effort to equate opposition to the Israeli state with hatred of Jewish people, silencing criticism of the Gaza genocide and US imperialism in the Middle East.

The unanimous passage of AB 715 exposes the class character of American politics. In May, the Assembly approved it 68–0; the Senate followed 35–0; and the Assembly concurred 71–0. Not a single Democrat or Republican voiced objection. The “progressive” state that boasts of diversity and inclusion has united the entire establishment behind a law attacking freedom of speech, placing in grave danger academic freedom and democratic principles.

Unanimity among the ruling class is not progress but a warning. The American capitalist class achieves consensus when preparing war, abroad or at home. AB 715 is a declaration of war on democratic rights and public education, part of the ideological groundwork for dictatorship in the United States which will only facilitate the Trump administration’s war on the working class.

Criminalizing anti-Zionism and political thought

Behind the humanitarian rhetoric of “safe learning environments,” AB 715 represents the most sweeping state intrusion into political expression in California’s history. The law establishes a new Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under the Government Operations Agency (of the executive branch) granting it vast powers to investigate, penalize and censor schools, teachers, students and curriculum providers. A governor-appointed “Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator” (APC), confirmed by the Senate, is authorized to shape curricula, with power to issue policy directives and propose legislation.

AB 715 amends the state’s Education Code to prohibit “advocacy, personal opinion, bias, or partisanship” in instruction and declares that discriminatory bias requires no “direct harm” or even a “protected group member.” This vague and sweeping language effectively criminalizes any viewpoint opposing official ideology. Teachers who discuss Israel’s origins, the Nakba, or the US-backed genocide in Gaza could be accused of “antisemitic bias” and face investigation or dismissal.

The law aligns California’s policy with the Biden administration’s National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, which endorses the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. Although AB 715 avoids naming IHRA directly, it adopts its logic wholesale—using the guise of anti-hate enforcement to suppress anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian, anti-genocide and socialist expression.

In an attempt to conceal the law’s true purpose, Democrats broadened the bill’s scope by advancing the companion Senate Bill 48, signed by Newsom the same day, to include protections against discrimination based on religious beliefs, race and ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, an example of identity politics weaponized to erode democratic rights under a false egalitarian banner.

Civil liberties groups have condemned AB 715. The ACLU of California warned that it “goes far beyond protecting students from harassment or violence” and will chill constitutionally protected speech. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CA) denounced it for “weaponizing anti-discrimination law to shield Israel from criticism.”

Their warnings are justified: AB 715 explicitly defines discrimination to include vilification of “Jews and Israelis” and permits charges based on “nationality,” codifying the conflation of Zionism with Jewish identity and equating opposition to a colonial-settler state with hate.

Under AB 715, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs)—school districts and charter networks—must investigate and remedy any alleged “bias” they “know or have reason to know” has occurred, even without a complaint or evidence of harm. The state superintendent is empowered to impose “corrective actions,” fines and mandate the permanent removal of instructional materials deemed discriminatory.

These punitive powers extend beyond schools to private curriculum vendors and training providers, who must repay funds and publicly

confess violations if their content is judged to “promote discrimination.” This modernized form of book burning embeds corporate-style “content moderation” into public education.

The state thus shifts from regulating educational quality to enforcing ideological conformity. Teachers are reduced to state functionaries, compelled to self-censor and monitor students’ speech. The result will be a profound chilling effect on classroom discussions, especially concerning war, genocide, imperialism and colonialism.

The Democrats’ leading role

AB 715 was spearheaded by Democratic Assemblymember Rick Zbur, a self-proclaimed liberal champion of civil rights, and signed with great fanfare by Governor Newsom, who declared it would make California “a national model in the fight against hate.” In reality, it makes the state a national model for government censorship allied with the political right.

The Democrats’ sponsorship of this law exposes the bipartisan nature of the assault on democratic rights. Despite their posturing against Trump and the far right, both parties share a common class goal: defending capitalism through repression. They are united in silencing criticism of US imperialism and its Israeli ally.

AB 715’s authoritarian character is unmistakable. By erecting an apparatus of surveillance and punishment over teachers and students, the Democrats are actively collaborating with the Trump administration in wielding direct ideological control over education. The pretense of “inclusivity” masks the construction of mechanisms that can (and will) be turned against any expression of opposition to militarism, inequality, repression or dictatorship.

Just as the Biden administration’s alliance with social media companies established frameworks to censor anti-war and socialist voices online, California’s “civil rights” law creates the administrative machinery for classroom censorship. The political logic is to stifle public dissent by redefining opposition to imperialism as “hate.”

Significantly, the role of the California Teachers Association (CTA) in this process exposes the complicity of the union bureaucracy with the Democratic Party. During a hearing before the Assembly Education Committee on May 14, 2025, CTA President David Goldberg issued only a tepid objection, stating that “AB 715 raises serious free speech concerns, leaving teachers uncertain about what they can lawfully say in the classroom on a wide range of issues. At a time when too many are seeking to attack academic freedom and weaponize public education, AB 715 would unfortunately arm ill-intentioned people with the ability to do so.”

Yet after this mild comment, the CTA fell silent. No organized campaign, no call to mobilize teachers or students, no public opposition followed. By refusing to mount a genuine struggle against the bill, the union leadership effectively abandoned hundreds of thousands of educators and students to state repression, confirming its role as an appendage of the Democratic Party and an enforcer of its political agenda.

The broader implications

The significance of AB 715 is not confined to questions of free speech. It is a frontal assault on public education itself. The law transforms schools into instruments of state ideology, where historical analysis must conform to the political needs of the ruling class.

At stake is not merely the right to discuss the crimes of Zionism or the genocide in Gaza, but the right to teach (and learn) history truthfully: the right to name imperialism, capitalism and class exploitation as the root causes of war and oppression. Under the new law, lessons on colonialism, racism or the origins of fascism may be censored as “biased” or “partisan.” Discussions of Marxism, anti-imperialist movements, or the revolutionary struggles of the working class could be deemed inappropriate or even unlawful.

This destruction of intellectual freedom is inseparable from the decay of American democracy as a whole. The same political forces that censor classrooms are gutting social spending, criminalizing protests, and preparing new wars abroad. The suppression of political speech in schools is not a separate issue but part of the ideological preparation for violent repression at home.

Genuine opposition to antisemitism cannot be entrusted to the capitalist state. It is inseparable from opposition to the Gaza genocide, nationalism, racism and imperialist war. Teachers, students and workers in California must recognize that no faction of the political establishment defends democratic rights. The trade unions, Democratic Party—and pseudo-left groups aligned with them—have all accepted censorship and imperialist propaganda.

The defense of free speech, academic freedom, public education and historical truth demands independent working class mobilization. Rank-and-file committees of educators and students must organize in every district to oppose AB 715, defend persecuted teachers and link the fight for socialism to the struggle for democratic rights and against war, austerity and inequality.



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