

Writers Against the War on Gaza proposes a boycott of the New York Times

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Writers Against the War on Gaza (WAWOG) has proposed a boycott/divest/unsubscribe campaign against the *New York Times* on the basis of that newspaper's "manufacturing consent for war, for exploitation, for genocide." Several hundred writers, scholars and public figures have expressed support for the effort, pledging not to write for the *Times* Opinion section "in a collective effort to hold the paper accountable for its role in the genocide in Gaza," according to one media report. The signatories include nearly 150 past *Times* contributors.

The broader list of 300 includes the names of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, journalists Chris Hedges and Dave Zirin, filmmaker Elia Suleiman, physician and author Gabor Maté, activist Greta Thunberg, novelists Mary Gaitskill and Sally Rooney, artist Nan Goldin and Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the Democratic congresswoman from Michigan.

WAWOG, as part of its indictment, focuses specifically on a filthy December 2023 article published by the *Times*, "'Screams Without Words': How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7," in which the newspaper passed on various wild allegations about rape and sexual violence during the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks. The piece, WAWOG notes, was

bylined by a *Times* reporter with a long history of fabrication (Jeffrey Gettleman); a filmmaker who served in the IOF's intelligence division and works for Israeli state media (Anat Schwartz); and a 24-year-old food blogger (Schwartz's nephew by marriage, Adam Sella). Schwartz had never reported for the *Times*—or, in fact, for any newspaper—before being recruited by Gettleman himself to help produce evidence of "widespread sexual assault."

The article and the associated claims about sexual assault and other outrages have been exposed by investigators. Cited by WAWOG, *Intercept* reporters Ryan Grim, Jeremy Scahill and Daniel Boguslaw, in the course of debunking the *Times* article, observed that Anat Schwartz was not primarily responsible for the fraud:

She may harbor animosity toward Palestinians, lack the experience with investigative journalism, and feel conflicting pressures between being a supporter of Israel's war effort and a *Times* reporter, but Schwartz did not commission herself and Sella to report one of the most consequential stories of the war. Senior leadership at the *New York Times* did.

Indeed, the *Times* has been a constant and willing accomplice of the heinous and sadistic Zionist criminality. As the WSWWS commented, on the second anniversary of the October 7 events:

While carried out by Israel, the genocide has been a joint operation of world imperialism. Every imperialist government, from Washington to London, Paris and Berlin, together with the entire media, justified the Israeli assault on Gaza. A hideous double standard was adopted, in which any act of mass murder by Israel, which illegally occupies Gaza, was justified, while any effort at resistance by the Palestinians was demonized as "terrorism."

The exposure and discrediting of the *New York Times* is an important task of political and intellectual hygiene, indispensable to the development of socialist consciousness. The *Times*, the "paper of record," plays a significant role in shaping public opinion in the US. It hypocritically, deceitfully postures as the voice of civilization, democracy and liberal moderation while functioning in practice as an instrument of American imperialist propaganda, often as the obvious conduit for CIA and Pentagon—or Mossad—disinformation (e.g., the December 2023 article on alleged October 7 sexual violence).

Speaking generally for the Democratic Party, the newspaper is most vigorous at present in attempting to smother opposition to Donald Trump and prevent it from challenging the domination of the corporate-financial oligarchy and the two-party system.

Such a critique of the *Times* is not the perspective, however, of WAWOG. It argues that

The *New York Times* is a failed institution that serves only the powerful and the morally lazy. By refusing to name the perpetrator—the Israeli occupation forces—of the deadliest war on journalists in history, the editorial board of *Times* has shown that they do not even serve their own profession. By shaping its coverage in accordance with Israeli state dictates and Zionist threats, the executives of the *Times* have become not only complicit in, but accountable for, the slaughter of Gaza.

Overstatement, that the *Times* is "accountable" for the Gaza slaughter, here combines with a dangerously false assertion. To argue

that the *Times* is a “failed institution” suggests that its proper role would be to inform and alert the population to imperialist atrocities, for example. But this is not so.

Granted that the newspaper’s editorial board has shifted far to the right, along with the rest of the American political and media establishment, since the Vietnam War era, the *Times* is performing precisely the role that capitalist society sets out for it and other such publications. Marxists understand as ABC that “All over the world,” in Lenin’s words, “freedom of the press means freedom to buy up newspapers, to buy writers, to bribe, buy and fake ‘public opinion’ for the benefit of the bourgeoisie.”

WAWOG pays lip service to this understanding at one point, commenting that the

Times’ reputation for liberalism, for rigor, for non-partisan independence is precisely what makes it so dangerous, because it hides what it really is: a publication that exists to serve the interests of U.S. imperialism.

Yes, on Gaza and other questions, the *Times* is not making a mistake or an error in editorial opinion. It is ruthlessly pursuing the agenda of American big business. But that reality entirely cuts against the perspective of WAWOG of applying pressure on the media and other institutions. Its three demands are

- 1) The [*Times*] newsroom must conduct a review of anti-Palestinian bias and produce new editorial standards for Palestine coverage.
- 2) The newsroom must retract the widely debunked investigation “Screams Without Words.”
- 3) The Editorial Board must call for a U.S. arms embargo on Israel.

WAWOG goes on:

These demands are neither impossible nor unreasonable. The paper has updated its style guide in response to public and internal pressure before. In 1987, facing public criticism, *Times* editors updated the paper’s style guide and later took stock of its scant and biased coverage of the AIDS crisis. The *Times* has also issued retractions. In the wake of the Iraq war, the *Times* catalogued the many unverified claims it repeated, pushed out the author responsible for some of its most egregious coverage, and apologized for printing biased commentary as fact.

So, the newspaper that “exists to serve the interests of U.S. imperialism” can relatively easily be pushed into telling the truth about Gaza and related matters and, moreover, entering into opposition against central features of American imperialist foreign policy. This is unserious, to say the least, and it is difficult to believe that the statement’s authors or signatories believe this themselves. The *Times*, an experienced, crafty imperialist leopard, will not change

its spots, nor does it have the slightest motive or desire to do so.

In any case, why simply point to the *New York Times*? The US media as a whole has justified or apologized for the Gaza genocide. The *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, CNN, CBS, NBC, ABC and the rest (even leaving aside the openly far-right, fascistic outlets) all have foul records. The singling out of the *Times*, even in scathing language, has the consequence of suggesting that certain “bad” capitalist media outlets should be denounced, and the “good” ones encouraged. On the other hand, if the WAWOG statement were to generalize soberly about the media, it would tend to point in the direction of a condemnation of the economic and political organization of the society as a whole.

It fails to make such a condemnation. And here one must refer to the inclusion of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) as part of the WAWOG coalition and the presence of Tlaib among the statement’s signatories. The DSA and Tlaib are indispensable components of the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of the American ruling elite, *indispensable in particular* to the current effort to channel mass opposition within the existing political set-up.

Hence the half-politics of the statement. It denounces the *Times* and its complicity, the crimes of imperialism, in sharp terms, but says nothing about concrete political life in the US, in particular, the pernicious role of the Democrats, who stand behind and loom over the *Times*. It feebly refers to “accountability” and “failed institutions,” which ought to convince no one. In the end, it proposes another version of discredited, single-issue protest politics.

It is time to say clearly what is. Capitalism is the central question. Homicidal Zionism is an agency of world capitalism. The mass murder in Gaza emerges from the intense crisis of imperialism, its reckless abandonment of any “red lines” and its counterrevolutionary ferocity against the gains and rights of the international working class.

There are angry, serious writers and others who have attached their names to the WAWOG declaration. They and others need to think seriously about these issues. The orientation today must be toward the independent organization and socialist political development of the working class, the only force capable of putting an end to the horrors in Gaza and elsewhere.



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