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USA

The “Antisemitism” Smear Weaponized

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WHILE THE HORROR of the Israeli-United States genocidal war on Gaza continues with no letup or resolution in sight, there has been only one really hopeful development: the outpouring of pro-Palestinian activism in many U.S. communities, most especially the magnificent movement on college campuses organized in encampments demanding an immediate permanent ceasefire, and divestment from corporations tied to Israel’s machinery of massacre and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

Because of this movement’s moral authority and power in the face of a monstrous slaughter funded by U.S. tax dollars, it’s not surprising that it has come under attack from multiple directions including reprisals by campus administration and violent police action against students and sympathetic faculty members.

We want to focus here on a specific smear against the movement: that it is “antisemitic” or advocates “genocide of the Jewish people.” This lie is endlessly cycled through much of the media, in the spectacle of Congressional hearings and now legislation mandating “antisemitism watch” offices at universities, and of course through the “pro-Israel” lobby groups spearheaded by AIPAC (America Israel Political Affairs Committee) and the Anti-Defamation League.

Much of the hysteria in Congress and media is propelled by far-right MAGA elements who, of course, had little to say about the torch-carrying “Jews will not replace us” white-supremacist marchers in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. It’s actually part of a broader Republican campaign to discredit and ultimately crush any progressive expressions in college education, especially liberal arts.

The “antisemitism” smear against Palestine solidarity makes a convenient opportunist addition to existing targets such as Diversity-Equity-Inclusion programs, Critical Race Theory, gender studies, anything “woke” and other perceived threats to what the right wing regards as western civilization. Not coincidentally, it’s also a pretext to slash huge holes in protections of free speech and to purge academic institutions.

This includes a drive to literally criminalize slogans of “Free, free Palestine” and “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” (No one proposes to outlaw the statement from Israel’s ruling Likud party and prime minister Netanyahu, “from the river to the sea, total Israeli sovereignty.”) Whatever these phrases might mean to different people in different places, there can be no excuse for banning them as so-called hate speech or “genocide of the Jewish people.”

In this climate it’s necessary both to defend Palestine solidarity activism and to state clearly what antisemitism is – and isn’t. Antisemitism is an ideology of hatred and contempt for Jews, as a people and as individuals. While it has centuries-old roots in religious bigotry, for the past 150 or so years, beginning in Europe, antisemitism has taken the form of pseudo-scientific racial theory. Like all forms of racism it is irrational, and in the specific case of antisemitism it ascribes to Jews various schemes to control finance, politics, media etc.

In its most extreme forms, of course, antisemitic ideology and myth fueled the Nazi extermination machinery that almost wiped out Jewish life in much of Europe. At less visible levels it persists and tends to arise at moments when racism in general raises its ugly head – as for example in the United States in the anti-Black backlash following the election of president Obama and the ascendancy of Donald Trump.

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Antisemitism as a set of racial anti-Jewish stereotypes is not to be confused with critical analysis of the Israeli state. Israel’s “crimes of apartheid and persecution” (as called by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) against the Palestinian people are no more immune from scrutiny than those of the United States in Vietnam and Iraq, Russia in Ukraine or China against the Uyghur people, the Indian government’s Hindutva campaign against Muslims, etc. Israel’s ideological claim to act as the “nation-state of the Jewish people” falsely – and dangerously — seeks to make all Jews responsible for its criminal acts.

Under these conditions, and with live-streamed genocidal atrocities in Gaza growing by the day, it may be surprising and encouraging that so few actual antisemitic incidents have actually occurred. More of these have occurred off campus than on, such as the Proud Boys gathering near Columbia or one hate-speech ranter outside the gate. (One campus protest organizer musing about “killing Zionists” was immediately repudiated.)

In the notorious case of Northeastern University in Boston, administration called police onto campus after “Kill the Jews” chanting was reported – which video footage showed coming from an apparent counterdemonstrator carrying an Israeli flag.

There have been many more physical attacks and threats against Palestinian, Arab and Muslim than against Jewish students. All of them, of course, are vicious and absolutely unacceptable on campus or anywhere else. Attacks on Jewish students are both morally repugnant and damaging to the Palestine solidarity movement.

It’s important however to emphasize a point made by Columbia and Barnard professor Nadia Abu el-Haj, who herself has been a target of Zionist smear campaigns during her academic career. Everyone on campus, she states, has an absolute right to be safe. That does not give anyone a right to shut down speech or protest just because they don’t feel safe.

In fact, part of the purpose of the right-wing attack – joined deplorably by much of the center-liberal establishment – on the pro-Palestine campus struggle is aimed to make Jews feel unsafe. Weaponizing Jewish insecurity in this way, as a tool against an anti-genocide struggle, can be seen itself as a manipulation of antisemitism.

Is real antisemitism increasing in the United States today? Probably so (although unfortunately the once-useful statistics compiled by the ADL are now entirely unreliable since it acts as a propaganda and intelligence outpost of the Israeli state). It needs to be resolutely fought, along with all other expressions of racism. It is not to be confused with denunciation of what must be understood, again, as the joint Israeli-U.S. genocide in Palestine.

Here is the [Statement from the Concerned Jewish Faculty Against Antisemitism](#)

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Source [Solidarity](#).

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