

# ‘Pay No Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain’

*Progressive Activists Try to Deflect Blame for Their Own Campus Anti-Semitism*

by Richard L. Cravatts



In early December, a bipartisan Congressional bill, H.R. 6421/S. 10, the “Antisemitism Awareness Act,” took on a long-overdue task, namely, increasing “understanding of the parameters of contemporary anti-Jewish conduct and will assist the Department of Education in determining whether an investigation of anti-Semitism under title VI is warranted.”

“Jewish students,” the bill accurately noted, “are being threatened, harassed, or intimidated in their schools . . . including through harassing conduct that creates a hostile environment so severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit some students’ ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities

offered by schools.”

The Department of Education had been alerted before to the distressing situation of resurgent anti-Semitism on university campuses, but previous evaluations of Title VI violations were imprecise and “did not provide guidance on current manifestation of anti-Semitism, including discriminatory anti-Semitic conduct that is couched as anti-Israel or anti-Zionist.”

This was all too much for critics, including the morally tendentious, malignant group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), who immediately condemned the intent of the bill, attaching to a December 8th press release two letters with signatures from 60 Jewish Studies “scholars” and some 300 “concerned” Jewish student activists, respectively.

Clearly oblivious to the current scourge of anti-Israel, anti-Semitic campus activism (in which they have, not coincidentally, been active and complicit), JVP and these faculty and students derided the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act as misguided and dangerous, not because it provides a tool for finally being able to identify instances where anti-Semitic speech and behavior has infected campus communities, but because they believe, seemingly irrationally, that Jewish students are actual and potential victims, not of Leftist and Muslim student groups (as they clearly and demonstrably are), but of Right-wing extremist groups, emboldened, they contend, by the election of Donald Trump in November.

The campus war against Israel, promoted relentlessly and virulently for some 15 years now, has been fueled and given life, not by the occasional Nazi-loving skinhead living in his mother’s basement and living on the fringes of society without a substantial base of like-minded fellow travelers, but by student-funded, highly visible, and vocal on-campus groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine (with 220 chapters nationwide) and the Muslim Student Association (with over 600

chapters). Jewish Voice for Peace, along with Open Hillel, J Street U, and other pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel groups, frequently join forces with these virulent groups on campuses to stage Israel Apartheid Weeks, construct mock apartheid walls, and sponsor hate-Israel events, seminars, courses, speeches, and boycott and divestment resolutions—all of which appear promiscuously on campuses around the country, and which are, significant to the Antisemitism Awareness Act, the primary source of the hostile environment Jewish students experience, especially, as often happens, when anti-Israel, anti-Zionist radicalism morphs into anti-Semitism.

These perpetrators of anti-Israel agitation have been leading a virulent campaign to demonize and delegitimize Israel for years now, and it is astonishing that JVP and these meretricious scholars and students ignore all the factual and shameful chronology (of which they have been central fomenters and cheerleaders in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign), and instead are trying to perpetuate the fantasy that the true threat to Jewish students and other Israel supporters is from the Left's perennial boogeymen, the lunatic fringe of white power extremists who these willfully-blind activists believe, and want others to believe, are the chief perpetrators of anti-Jewish bigotry.

Putting aside the obvious fact that it is JVP and many of these well-known anti-Israel faculty signatories themselves who are intimately involved in creating the hostile climate on campuses across the country, the notion that there is any basis in fact that Right-wing extremists have or will pose any serious threat to Jewish students, and that their ascension is the direct result and logical extension of President-elect Trump's election, is an astoundingly naïve and specious notion.

In fact, on university campuses the far Right is essentially invisible, especially in the politically correct culture of Leftist students and faculty which has not only subsumed any

opposing viewpoints but barely tolerates conservative or Republican viewpoints, let alone the presence on campus of purveyors of the repugnant ideology of skin heads, white power advocates, or anti-gay, anti-Muslim, or anti-Hispanic radicals. On predominantly liberal campuses, it is obvious that no representatives from Aryan Nation, Ku Klux Klan, or Westboro Baptist Church are ever being invited to speak, let alone are campus chapters of these toxic groups going to be set up and paid for with student funds.

JVP and the faculty and students also had another breathtaking claim. Not only does the bill fail to address the actual source of anti-Semitism, they contend, but it is many of *them* who are the actual targets of hatred, not Jewish students and others who support Israel. "By potentially targeting those offering criticism of the State of Israel, many of whom are Jews themselves, (and not the white supremacists emboldened by President-elect Trump), this bill fails to confront the real threats facing Jews in America," contended these individuals who claim suddenly to be experts on the nature and source of contemporary anti-Semitism. "Instead," they suggested, with an obvious terror at having to be held to account for the corrosive and counter-productive ideology they have chosen to promote, "this bill poses a threat to human rights advocates, scholars, and students. . . ."

What is the nature of the specific "threat" they suggested the bill will pose? As anti-Israel activists did in California when the Regents implemented a resolution to help identify anti-Semitic speech masquerading as mere "criticism of Israel," these scholars and students are mortified that their right to libel, slander, and relentlessly demean Israel, Zionism, and Jewish self-determination will be curtailed by the implementation of a bill aimed at classifying and identifying anti-Semitic speech, not proscribing it. Of course, what critics of Israel and actual anti-Semites want is to be able to utter any calumny they wish without any

repercussions, and certainly without having to defend the viability of their ideology or needing to contend with accusations that they are actually anti-Semitic in their activism—despite seeing themselves merely as “passionate young activists organizing for justice,” whose advocacy is, in their estimation, morally pure and beyond reproach.

The student signatories on one of the JVP letters share the paranoid fantasies of their academic elders, who chronically bemoan perceived restrictions on their right and ability to slander Israel and Jews, even though groups like JVP and SJP regularly violate those very academic free speech precepts by shouting down, heckling, and interfering with pro-Israel speakers, events, and celebrations in their toxic campaign to promote their own view of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and foreclose any opposing views. That one-sided monologue, of course, violates the core principal of academic freedom of speech and expression, but it apparently has never occurred to these social justice warriors that free speech is a right enjoyed by parties on both sides of an argument, and that the same protections they exploit and enjoy are necessarily available to and can be claimed by their ideological opponents.

“At a time when freedom of expression is under threat across the country,” the students disingenuously cautioned, “we need to be protecting and expanding speech, not restricting it.” But that assumption is false, for two reasons. First, it assumes, mistakenly, that the intent of this anti-Semitism bill is to silence criticism of Israel rather than to help administrators and others define it as anti-Semitic when and if it actually is. The purpose of the bill, as well as the U.S. State Department’s own working definition of anti-Semitism, is only to help define and categorize anti-Semitic speech, not to suppress it, and it specifically upholds all First Amendment rights of JVP and anyone else to utter and give expression to whatever level of hateful speech they wish.

No one is telling these toxic Israel-haters to remain silent—or even to not utter anti-Semitic speech. What working definitions and anti-Semitism awareness bills do hope to achieve is to allow those who are pretending only to be anti-Israel but are actually anti-Semitic to be identified as such. The measures are not designed to criminalize or suppress speech, even what we would consider “hate” speech, although going forward Israel-haters may not be able to disguise their anti-Jewish bigotry as successfully as they have when they pretended to care only for the rights of Palestinians and assailed the policies of the Jewish state.

It may be inconvenient and even embarrassing for these Israel-haters to finally be named for they are—radical, misguided activists whose unrelenting campaign of vitriol against the Jewish state and its supporters has regularly morphed into pure anti-Semitism—but their efforts to assign the blame to others for the miasma of dark bigotry on campuses they themselves have helped to create shows how crucial this Anti-Semitism Awareness Act is, and why its passage is important to help eliminate, finally, “the oldest hatred” from institutions of higher education.

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