

California Assembly passes resolution defining criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism

By Tom Carter
4 September 2012

Last month, the California State Assembly passed a resolution urging state educational institutions to more aggressively crack down on criticism of the state of Israel on campuses, which the resolution defines as “anti-Semitism.” The anti-democratic resolution is the latest step in the broader campaign to stifle and suppress dissent on California's increasingly volatile campuses.

The California State Assembly is the lower house of the state legislature, consisting of 80 members. The resolution—H.R. 35, “Relative to anti-Semitism”—was passed by a voice vote, after 66 members co-sponsored it, including a majority of both Republicans and Democrats in the Assembly.

The resolution was drafted by Republican Linda Halderman and passed without public discussion. The vote on the resolution came when most students were between semesters and away from their campuses.

The resolution (available [here](#)) uses the classic trick employed by defenders of Israel’s Zionist regime: lumping together any criticism of the Israeli state’s policies or the US government’s support for them with racist attacks on Jews.

The resolution denounces “swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti in residential halls, public areas on campus, and Hillel houses,” and denounces those who accuse “the Jewish people, or Israel, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.”

But the bulk of the resolution is dedicated to defining criticism of the state of Israel as “anti-Semitism.” It lists the following as examples of “anti-Semitism”:

- “language or behavior [that] demonizes and delegitimizes Israel;”
- “speakers, films, and exhibits” that indicate that “Israel is guilty of heinous crimes against humanity such as ethnic cleansing and genocide;”

- describing Israel as a “racist” or “apartheid” state;
- “student-and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment, and sanction campaigns against Israel;”
- “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination;”
- “applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation;” and
- “actions of student groups that encourage support for terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.”

This list makes clear that the accusations of anti-Semitism are a red herring, employed to attack students’ democratic rights and stifle dissent. The resolution recalls the smear campaign against German author Günter Grass and his poem “What Must Be Said” earlier this year.

Defending the poem, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained: “Anti-Semitism is the term used to describe racist hatred aimed at the oppression and persecution of Jews—and in the case of the Third Reich, the extermination of Jews. Grass’s criticisms of the war policy of the Netanyahu government are not directed against Jews, nor against Jews in Israel. His overwhelming concern is the well-being of both the Jewish population in Israel and the Iranian people. This is in stark contrast to the Israeli government.

“The Israeli regime does not represent the interests of the Jewish population, but rather a tiny rich and corrupt clique that has always worked closely with American imperialism.” (See: “Defend Günter Grass!”)

The aggressive narrowness of the resolution's definition of acceptable political discussion, combined with its broad definition of anti-Semitism, prompted the University of California to distance itself from the resolution, though without rejecting or denouncing it.

“We think it's problematic because of First Amendment concerns,” UC spokesman Steve Montiel told the *San Francisco Chronicle* last week.

The resolution does clearly implicate the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech and political expression. Moreover, it must be said that the State of Israel is, as a matter of fact, guilty of crimes against humanity.

To cite only a more recent example, the 574-page UN Goldstone Report published in 2010 found that the State of Israel had deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza during the 2008-2009 “Operation Cast Lead.” The invasion of Gaza saw 1,400 Palestinians killed, compared with 13 Israelis killed. More than 21,000 buildings, factories, and apartments were damaged or destroyed.

Under California H.R. 35, it appears that the Goldstone report is now to be considered “anti-Semitic.”

The resolution also contains a denunciation of “suppression and disruption of free speech that presents Israel's point of view.” This appears to be a reference to the “Irvine 11” incident last year, in which 11 students shouted down Israeli ambassador Michael Oren during his speech at the University of California at Irvine.

The 11 students shouted, “Michael Oren, you’re a war criminal,” and “You, sir, are an accomplice to genocide.” These students were later arrested, charged and convicted of the crimes of “conspiracy” and violating Oren’s rights. (See “University of California students convicted for protesting Israeli ambassador’s speech.”)

The resolution goes on to state that the “Assembly recognizes recent actions by officials of public post secondary educational institutions in California [e.g., the prosecutions of the Irvine 11] and calls upon those institutions to increase their efforts to swiftly and unequivocally condemn acts of anti-Semitism on their campuses and to utilize existing resources . . . to help guide campus discussion about, and promote, as appropriate, educational programs for combating anti-Semitism on their campuses.”

On California's campuses, as on campuses and workplaces internationally, explosive class antagonisms are increasingly apparent. Massive tuition hikes year after year coupled with job losses and skyrocketing youth unemployment present an entire

generation of young people with an increasingly impossible situation.

State authorities in California, which is controlled by the Democratic Party, have watched the large campus protests that took place across state campuses over the past two years with hostility, consternation, and fear.

Over the past year, at the behest of Democratic Party officials, demonstrating students across the state have been attacked by paramilitary police squads armed with batons, tear gas, and flash grenades, with hundreds of students arrested and jailed. The world's attention was captured when students peacefully protesting tuition hikes at UC Davis were pepper sprayed by police in cold blood.

In the face of increasing tensions and protests, state authorities are moving to clamp down on the campuses, intervening to “guide campus discussion” and criminalize criticism of both domestic and foreign policy. Under the guise of criticizing “anti-Semitism” the state government is signaling that the persecution of student protesters will be tolerated or welcomed.

The resolution concludes that “strong leadership from the top remains an important priority so that no administrator, faculty, or student group can be in any doubt that anti-Semitic activity will not be tolerated in the classroom or on campus, and that no public resources will be allowed to be used for anti-Semitic or any intolerant agitation.”

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>