



THE BULLSHEET

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“GRANVILLE’S LARGEST DAILY PUBLICATION”

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STUDENTS AGAINST RACIST RHETORIC

Student Organizers for Palestine,
Submission

"We, student organizers at Denison, write this letter to address "Response to statement on justice in Palestine: A letter to our communities" in the November 15th issue of the Denisonian. We feel a responsibility as organizers to respond to this dangerous and defamatory statement from tenured, White faculty members who used their positions of power and privilege to publicly target student organizers on this campus, echoing anti-Palestinian rhetoric which justifies the ongoing genocide against Palestinians.

We want to make it clear that the manner in which this letter was disseminated is unacceptable. Their letter was a response to "Statement on Justice in Palestine" a statement co-authored by several organizations across Denison, Kenyon, Oberlin, and Wooster to demand that our administrations call for a ceasefire and end to the occupation of Palestine, protect the rights and freedoms of their students, and divest from Israeli arms manufacturers. Prior to publicly releasing this letter in the Denisonian, none of these faculty reached out to any of the students or student organizations involved in writing this statement to discuss or clarify any concerns. Importantly, none of these faculty attended any of the numerous events put on by SJP, DSA, and MSA specifically for the purpose of dialogue, discussion, and collective learning. Instead, these individuals decided to publicly defame and discredit students, faculty, alumni, or staff who signed the "Statement on Justice in Palestine" and leaders, members, and allies of SJP, MSA, and DSA. As faculty, the authors and signatories of this letter hold power over the student organizers they are targeting. Their choice to publicly defame students who they might work with, without ever attempting to speak to them, is entirely inappropriate. It is also important to note that all signatories are White and tenured, and many hold prestigious organizational positions, granting them the institutional security to wield their power in this irresponsible fashion. Most of the student organizers whom they targeted are part of already marginalized and vulnerable student populations. The faculty response claims to care about dialogue and community but, regardless of the authenticity of this claim, this letter served to hurt and alienate students in an environment often to student activism.

The letter-writers state that one of "the most shocking and dishonest aspects of the letter is its failure to mention the Oct. 7 massacre that sparked the broader conflict in the Gaza strip." Firstly, as mentioned above, the purpose of the statement was to demand a response from our administration, who have already condemned the events of October 7th in the strongest possible language. Secondly, as organizers for justice in Palestine, we have addressed the events of October 7th and organized a packed community town hall with credible, fact-checked information, resources, and a space for dialogue between students with opposing viewpoints. It is disingenuous to claim that the authors of Statement for Justice in Palestine are responsible for making others feel "silenced, hated, and unsafe." We stand by our statement because, unlike the authors of this response letter, we have spent time, effort, and resources to build a community and engage in difficult conversations. If these individuals feel unsafe or refuse to engage with our work because we name Palestine and demand justice, we ask them to interrogate these knee-jerk reactions and welcome them to these spaces of dialogue and learning. We mark the present moment with grief, rage, and a commitment to justice but we refuse to exceptionalize this violence. The events of the last two months cannot be understood outside the context of the militarization, occupation, and settler-colonialism that has been the reality for Palestinians for many, many decades. This recognition is not a technique of justification — it is an indisputable fact and the first step towards justice for all impacted parties. Had the letter-writers made any attempt to contact the authors of the statement with their concerns, they would have been directed towards our past work, resources, and clarity and they could have refrained from speculating and assigning motivations of their own creation to the authors of the statement.

This letter directly states that students "[side] with the terrorists of Hamas," and "support... jihadist terrorists." In the context of the post-9/11 or current U.S. political climate, the usage of the word "terrorist" is deeply rooted in racism, especially Islamophobia, and emerges from White racial anxiety and U.S. imperialism. Islamophobic, racist, and colonial notions of the Middle East in the West justify the perpetual U.S. funded "War on Terror" in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. This usage of terms like jihadist and terrorist are not condemnations of violence, but a tacit reinforcement of the nation-state's (e.g. U.S. and Israel) monopoly over the use of violence. The profiling and surveillance of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim populations in the United States is tied to the U.S. led "War on Terror" that manifests as violence against communities of color in the U.S. and entire populations in the Global South. This is starkly clear in the heightened violence against Palestinian communities in the U.S. since October 7th, often in response to these incitements of violence painting Palestinians and other marginalized communities as "terrorists." This letter must be situated in the same vein, a defamatory attempt to evoke a visceral reaction in the readers. We want to reiterate that not only is this rhetoric hurtful for all students, it also justifies unfair disciplinary action, a climate of fear, and racist violence against the many students involved in this organizing. Accusing them of being "terrorist sympathizers" poses a genuine threat to their ability to live safely in a country and community already steeped in Islamophobia.

Another issue with the faculty response is the unquestioning and uncritical repetition of unverified claims and outright propaganda from the Israeli government. The letter-writers offer absolutely no criticisms of Israel's military assault, instead assigning the military noble motivations, stating that this bombardment "aims to break the terrorists' hold on power, secure the border, and bring the Israeli hostages home." Furthermore, the letter-writers claim that Israel is attempting to

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CONT. FROM THE FRONT

“avoid harming civilians” and this is “complicated by Egypt’s reluctance to open the Rafah crossing.” Let us be clear: this is advocating for ethnic cleansing. We reject the implication that the solution to Israel’s massacre of civilians in Gaza is for Palestinians to be forced off their land. It is utterly despicable that these letter-writers advocate for the population of Gaza to be displaced from their homeland once again. They also blame the deaths of civilians on “the fact that Hamas fighters are dug into a maze of tunnels...deliberately turning Palestinian civilians into human shields.” Along with the United Nations and major medical and humanitarian organizations, we categorically reject and condemn this framework. Palestinians are not “human shields,” they are human beings and nothing justifies Israel’s complete siege, which Human Rights Watch, the UN, and Amnesty International have all termed as collective punishment, in violation of international law.

The letter-writers’ claims that Israel’s intent is to simply eradicate threats of violence towards Israel is false, and we know this because of the implicit Israeli policy as has been clearly stated in the words of Israeli leaders and government officials themselves. In just the last 54 days, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu referenced scripture which urges the “slaying” of “man and woman, infant and suckling,” President Isaac Herzog justified violence against innocent civilians, stating that the “entire nation...is responsible,” and the Defense Minister Yoav Gallant dehumanized Palestinians, calling them “human animals” and saying “Gaza won’t return to what it was before. We will eliminate everything.” By the admission of Israeli leaders and state institutions, this assault on Gaza is not about breaking Hamas’ “hold on power” and freeing the hostages. Beyond these statements, the facts of Israel’s collective punishment against all people of Gaza reveal its brutal and genocidal nature. Over 22,000 people have been murdered. The IOF has targeted schools, hospitals, refugee camps, and places of worship. 1.9 million people (80% of the population) are internally displaced. Israel has now begun invading areas where they told Palestinians to flee. These are sobering facts that should shock our conscience. The letter-writers’ justification of these conditions through their uncritical repetition of the Israeli military’s messaging is not only disappointing coming from educators, but it also betrays their lack of concern for the Palestinian people. They briefly mention the “humanitarian catastrophe” that Palestinians are facing at the end of their response, but it reads as utterly disingenuous given that they spend the bulk of their statement justifying this deliberately created catastrophe.

Lastly, these faculty also made the appalling and baseless claim that SJP and the signatories of the co-authored statement “are calling for the elimination of the state of Israel and the Jewish people.” Their only piece of cherry-picked evidence is one phrase in the “Statement on Justice”: “we denounce the occupation and subjugation of the Palestinians and their land, which has been ongoing for more than seven decades.” It is an indisputable fact that Palestinian land has been continuously occupied for over a hundred years and that the Palestinian people have faced discrimination and brutality from the state of Israel. It is disingenuous and harmful to claim that identifying oppression against Palestinians and fighting against it indicates a desire to eliminate Jewish people. On the contrary, we as a collective of student organizers at Denison operate on a belief in collective liberation, the idea that none of us will have liberation until we all do, including Palestinians and Jewish people. SJP at Denison has, from its founding letter, repeatedly denounced antisemitism and held events that discuss antisemitism. Again, the authors of this letter probably do not know this since they have made no attempts at dialogue with any student organizers nor attended any of our events, but many of the organizers involved with SJP are Jewish themselves, and multiple Jewish students across the four colleges were involved in writing this statement. Given all of these factors, the statement that our “goal is to deny Jews the right to self-determination” rings untrue and utterly libelous. Our goal is liberation and justice for the Palestinian people, in service of liberation and justice for all people, and it is a goal we refuse to waver on.

We want to make it absolutely clear that this faculty response is not an isolated incident, but rather a continuation of a decades-long trend of targeting and silencing Palestinian students and student organizations who stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, which has only increased in the past two months. The accusations leveled in this letter rely on the same rhetoric being used to silence student organizers on campuses across the country. Last month, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ordered the “deactivation” of chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine at universities in Florida. Multiple universities, including Columbia, have recently suspended their chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine; Columbia also suspended its chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace. This trend should alarm all of us. Shutting these organizations down is not protecting students from antisemitism, but rather contributing to the widespread policy of forced censorship and suppression of free speech. On November 2, the ACLU published a statement calling for universities to “reject calls to investigate, disband, or penalize pro-Palestinian student groups for exercising their free speech rights.” This faculty response maliciously targets SJP and other vulnerable Denison student groups and organizers, contributing to this global trend.

Despite what the letter-writers may have expected, their accusations will not deter us from fighting for justice in Palestine. If anything, their attacks on student organizers and justification of the ongoing genocide against Palestinians have prompted us to reaffirm our solidarity with each other and the Palestinian people. We remain steadfast in our commitment to this cause and we urge all members of Denison’s community to stand with us.”



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