

In Solidarity with Palestine: A Surge in Suppression. How The Guardian Applies Censorship

It's never been this bad.

By [Dylan Saba](#)

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This piece was originally commissioned by an editor at The Guardian, who asked me to write about the wave of retaliation and censorship of political expression in solidarity with Palestinians that we've seen in the past two weeks.

Amid my work as an attorney on some of the resulting cases, I carved out some time to write the following. Minutes before it was supposed to be published, the head of the opinion desk wrote me an email that they were unable to run the piece. When I called her for an explanation she had none, and blamed an unnamed higher-up. That a piece on censorship would get killed in this way—without explanation, but plainly in the interest of political suppression—is, beyond the irony of the matter, a grave indictment of the media response to this critical moment in history.

—Dylan Saba

*On October 8, the morning after Hamas launched an attack from the Gaza strip that killed 1,400 Israelis, Ha'aretz—Israel's paper of record—**published an editorial laying blame for the massacre squarely on Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government.** "The disaster that befell Israel," the editorial board [wrote](#), "is the clear responsibility of one person: Benjamin Netanyahu." Netanyahu "completely failed to identify the dangers he was consciously leading Israel into when establishing a government of annexation and dispossession" and "embracing a foreign policy that openly ignored the existence and rights of Palestinians." It was a damning and powerful indictment.*

Two days later, Ryna Workman, the student body president of NYU Law School, sent out a newsletter to classmates as Israel's retaliatory assault on the Gaza Strip was well underway. Expanding on the *Ha'aretz* editorial board's language, Workman wrote that **"Israel bears full responsibility for this tremendous loss of life."** Workman also affirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle against oppression.

Almost immediately, they faced a torrent of backlash in the form of online disparagement and right-wing media attention. In response to pressure, the dean of the law school publicly condemned Workman's remarks. By the evening, the law firm Winston & Strawn, where Workman had planned to work after graduating, publicly [withdrew](#) their job offer without so much as a phone call. The university then unilaterally removed Workman from their position as student body president without any disciplinary process, and threatened further charges—all for daring to speak out.

Workman is not alone. Across the US, people speaking out on behalf of Palestinian human rights and against Israeli war crimes, apartheid policies, and settler-colonial expansion that have been unfolding over nearly eight decades are facing a wave of McCarthyite backlash directly targeting their future careers and livelihoods. Students at other prominent universities have faced the same: the leaders of Harvard University student groups were [doxxed and smeared](#) for signing a statement also expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people. Their names and faces were plastered on a mobile billboard truck that roamed around campus for days, and a "College Terror List" circulated online accusing them of antisemitism. Several also lost job offers. A Berkeley law professor published [an op-ed](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* imploring legal employers not to hire his own students and smearing them as antisemitic.

This new McCarthyist purge is not limited to students. Jackson Frank, a sports journalist in Philadelphia, was [fired](#) by Phillyvoice.com on October 10 after expressing solidarity with Palestinians. A [campaign](#) to remove a Palestinian Columbia professor is underway, with a petition circulating that has tens of thousands of signatures. These are just some of the highest-profile, most public cases.

That there is a growing chorus of support for Palestinian rights is galvanizing, and should come as no surprise. Over the past decade, the Palestine solidarity movement has made major headway in exposing Israel's apartheid policies and dispossession of Palestine and building grassroots support for change. At the same time, this growing movement has been met with new forms of suppression from Israeli advocacy groups, who have increasingly turned to blacklists, doxxing, and harassment to stifle dissent.

At Palestine Legal—the nonprofit organization where I work, which provides legal support to the Palestine solidarity movement—we've received hundreds of requests for assistance over the past two weeks, an exponential surge in our caseload. Many of those who have come to us are individuals facing negative consequences in their workplace for social media posts. Professors are being questioned, having their classes canceled, and getting locked out of email over statements supporting Palestinian rights, including in private communications.

In the vast majority of instances, the individuals targeted are Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, or Black, and many have faced racist and dehumanizing harassment as a result of the smears. Since 2014, we've handled thousands of such incidents—suppression of speech supporting

Palestinian rights is nothing new—but it’s never been this bad.

At a time when the United States is backing Israel’s wanton destruction of the besieged Gaza Strip, in what some scholars have [called](#) a “textbook case of genocide,” principled dissent is of paramount importance.

As 540+ members of the legal community have urged in a [statement](#), it is incumbent upon our elected officials, institutional decision-makers and all who care about preserving democracy to protect dissent on a matter of such domestic and international significance, and to prevent the racist targeting of communities based on their ethnic, racial, and religious identities and political views.

While the backlash we have seen is different in nature and degree to anything we have witnessed in recent years, activists—particularly of the youngest generations—also seem more resilient than ever and more willing to speak against injustice in Palestine despite the personal risks. Some, such as Ryna Workman, have [used](#) the spotlight thrust on them to continue to support Palestinian rights and oppose genocide.

But this level of bravery is not a fair thing to ask of already vulnerable people who are calling for justice and human rights. A failure to stop this new McCarthyism would be to surrender to the forces of reaction that tragically are carrying the day.

***Dylan Saba** is a Staff Attorney at Palestine Legal, where he advises Palestine human rights advocates on a number of issues, such as free speech violations, employment discrimination, bullying, and disciplinary actions.*

Prior to joining Palestine Legal, Dylan worked as a Staff Attorney for New York Legal Assistance Group’s Tenants’ Rights Unit. There, he represented low income New Yorkers in eviction proceedings and advised tenants on housing matters across New York City.

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