

UK Campuses Stifle Anti-War and Palestine Solidarity Activism



London, February 28 (RHC)-- The UK's often-criticized counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent, has advised universities and colleges to counter extremism by stifling anti-war and Palestine solidarity activism.

British university staff are being advised to watch out for students that may harbor "extremist views," such as vocal support for Palestine, opposition to Israeli settlements in Gaza, criticism of wars in the Middle East and opposition to Prevent, according to the training materials provided.

One campus has already felt the policy's censoring effect. The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) canceled an event organized by a Friends of Palestine society group, citing that it would be anti-Semitic and "unbalanced." A university spokesperson said: "We believe the proposed talk contravenes the new definition (of anti-Semitism) and furthermore breaches university protocols for such events, where we require assurances of a balanced view or a panel of speakers representing all interests."

The definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which the UK government adopted last year, is "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews" including "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, eg., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour."

"It is clear from social media posts, as well as an earlier statement issued by the university, that officials

caved to pressure from pro-Israel groups, and in so doing, threw their students – and their right to freedom of expression – under a bus,” journalist Ben White, who was slated to speak at the cancelled event, told The Middle East Eye.

"Israeli Apartheid Week is marked on campuses across the globe, and its importance is only underlined by the fact that the Israeli government –emboldened by the Trump administration – is so openly opposed to Palestinian self-determination.”

Sally Hunt, the general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU) told The Middle East Eye that the Prevent policy risks “doing more harm than good by shutting down debate on contentious topics and creating mistrust between teachers and students.”

"The government’s current approach risks silencing those who are most vulnerable, leaving them no space in which to express their opinions or be challenged safely," she said. "Universities and colleges rightly cherish academic freedom as a key principle of our civilized society, and we do not believe that draconian crackdowns on discussion of controversial issues will achieve the ends the government says it seeks."

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