

## The Last Word

## It's not about Jews and Arabs

By Russell Mokhiber

The other day, when talking about the slaughter in Gaza, a friend of mine in West Virginia said to me matter of factly that the Israel Palestine issue will never be resolved because “Jews and Arabs have been killing each other over there for hundreds of years.”

In response, I threw my friend a curveball – “It’s not about Jews and Arabs.”

That was the beginning of a conversation that took place just days before Egyptian born Columbia University President Minouche Shafik authorized the police to arrest more than 100 Columbia students, many of them Jewish, and take down the encampment the students had set up to protest the Israeli massacre in Gaza.

In response, the Columbia University chapter of the American Association of University Professors issued a statement saying they had “lost confidence in our president and our administration, and we pledge to fight to reclaim our university.”

One Jewish Ph.D. candidate told the *New York Times* that she was standing by the morals and ethics her Jewish faith had ingrained in her.

Another Jewish sophomore at the university, Iris Hsiang, said it was the university – rather than her fellow students – that had made her feel unsafe. Her only crime, she said, was “sitting and singing on the lawns.”

Hsiang said that the coming commemoration of Passover, which marks Jewish freedom from slavery in Egypt, weighed on her. It was part of why she felt compelled to join the encampment.

“Judaism means standing for the liberation of all people,” Hsiang told the *Times*. “And ‘never again’ means never again for anyone.”

Some of the most prominent voices for peace in the United States are Jewish voices for peace. And they agree – “never again means never again for anyone.”

Off the top of my head: Meade Benjamin, Max Blumenthal, Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein. Amy Goodman, Glenn Greenwald, Katie Haper and Aaron Mate.

The Arab in this story is Shafik, the President of Columbia.

“Like so many contemporary Ivy League presidents, Shafik is not a scholar or academic,”



Supporters and students continue a pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia University in New York on April 19, 2024 as part of ‘March for Divestment’ after more than 100 protesters were arrested and tents on lawn in the center of campus were removed.

Photo by Lev Radin/Sipa USA|Sipa via AP Images

Max Blumenthal wrote after Shafik authorized the arrests of the more than 100 Columbia students for peacefully protesting the Gaza slaughter. “She currently serves on the board of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, providing a patina of diversity to a supranational global governing entity guided by a single uber-billionaire.”

“Prior to that, Shafik acted as deputy governor of the Bank of England. She has also served in top roles at the IMF and World Bank, where global south debt becomes a point of leverage for Washington and London. Her own journey to the US began as a young child when Egypt’s populist President Gamal Abdel-Nasser seized land from her wealthy father,” Blumenthal said.

“Shafik owes her entire career to the trans-Atlantic oligarchy, and has no space in which to defy it. She was

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not appointed as president of Columbia to instill values like critical thinking or academic freedom. She’s there to raise hundreds of millions from her wealthy benefactors. Her leadership not only exemplifies the elite corruption of US universities, it exposes the sham of neoliberal diversity politics,” Blumenthal said.

On April 17, 2024, two days before Shafik ordered the arrest of the students, she appeared before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce where she was brow-beaten into submission by Congresswoman Elise Stefanik (R-New York).

In case she wasn’t aware of the nature of the hearing, she was tipped off by 23 Barnard Columbia Jewish faculty members who wrote her an April 10 letter, a week before she traveled to Capitol Hill, warning that the hearing was likely a stage for “disingenuous political theater” where Stefanik, “a member of congress with a history of espousing white nationalist politics” has been “calling university presidents to account for alleged antisemitism on their campuses.”

“To argue that taking a stand against Israel’s war on Gaza is antisemitic is to pervert the meaning of the term,” the Jewish faculty wrote.

“Labeling pro-Palestinian expression as anti-Jewish hate speech requires a dangerous

and false conflation of Zionism with Jewishness, of political ideology with identity. This conflation betrays a woefully inaccurate understanding – and disingenuous misrepresentation – of Jewish history, identity, and politics,” they wrote. “It erases more than a century of debates among Jews themselves about the nature of a Jewish homeland in the biblical Land of Israel, including Israel’s status as a Jewish nation-state. It dismisses the experiences of the post-Zionist, non-Zionist, and anti-Zionist Jews who work, study, and live on our campus.”

One of those Jewish professors signing the letter to Shafik was John Schamus, an Oscar-nominated screenwriter and Columbia University Professor.

“The charade is over, the masks are off,” Schamus said after Shafik ordered the arrests. “The Columbia administration can’t any longer pretend that it’s protecting Jewish students, faculty and staff from some undefined antisemitism. They are persecuting, harassing, jailing, intimidating Jewish and all other students, faculty and staff who are seeking to exercise not only their freedoms of speech and inquiry, but their very obligations as scholars and citizens.”

“Baroness Shafik’s email this morning announcing today’s massive crackdown comes hot on the heels of her groveling performance before the MAGA

McCarthyite inquisition in Washington, D.C. yesterday. It could not be more transparent or more dangerous.”

“She claims that she consulted with the academic Senate’s executive committee before calling in the police to haul off over one hundred and counting of our students,” Schamus said.

“That committee unequivocally rejected her call for confrontation and violence. But she proceeded anyway, opening the campus to the New York Police Department’s notorious Strategic Response Group, who set themselves upon our students – students who were sitting on the lawn, peacefully protesting, posing no hazard, no threat, not even an inconvenience to anyone, except of course to those in power, who want nothing more than to punish anyone who will remind us that not only the vast majority of Americans but the vast majority of young American Jews – and I’m speaking now of course as a Jewish faculty member – are sick of our government’s support of the ongoing slaughter in Gaza and the West Bank. The events on the Columbia campus are part of a broad national movement of brave truth-seeking young people,” Schamus said.

Speaking to the media, Schamus said – “in your coverage of these events, don’t for a minute pretend that at this point those young people’s sacrifices can be honestly framed as a chapter in some kind of Jewish versus pro-Palestinian political conflict.”

“The hundreds of signatures garnered just this past week in support of Columbia Barnard Jewish faculty letter rejecting the weaponization of anti-semitism attests to this truth,” Schamus said. “And while some Jewish faculty and students, and of course trustees, just like fundamentalist Christians and far right leaning other folks might want you to believe otherwise, the facts are the facts. Jews in America are rising up to say – not in our name – more clearly, more loudly and more fearlessly than ever.”

As I was saying, it’s not about Jews and Arabs, women and men, white people and dark people.

It’s about those who are complicit with the Congressional media military industrial killing machine.

And those who confront it.