

Texas primary teacher loses her job for refusing to sign a pro-Israel oath



Meanwhile, the self-proclaimed advocates and defenders of bourgeois 'free speech' stand mutely by.

The following extracts are reproduced from an article by Glenn Greenwald in [The Intercept](#), with thanks. A children's speech pathologist who has worked for the last nine years with developmentally disabled, autistic, and speech-impaired elementary school students in Austin, Texas, has been told that she can no longer work in the public school district, after she refused to sign an oath vowing that she "does not" and "will not" engage in a boycott of Israel or "otherwise take any action that is intended to inflict economic harm" on that foreign nation. A [lawsuit on her behalf](#) was filed [in December 2018] in a federal court in the Western District of Texas, alleging a violation of her first amendment right of free speech. The child language specialist, Bahia Amawi, is a US citizen who received a master's degree in speech pathology in 1999 and, since then, has specialised in evaluations for young children with language difficulties. Amawi was born in Austria and has lived in the US for the last 30 years. She speaks three languages fluently (English, German and Arabic) and has four US-born American children of her own. Amawi began working in 2009 on a contract basis with the Pflugerville independent school district, which includes Austin, to provide assessments and support for schoolchildren from the county's growing Arabic-speaking immigrant community. The children with whom she has worked span the ages of 3 to 11. Ever since her work for the school district began in 2009, her contract has been renewed each year with no controversy or problem.

New contract conditions

But this year, all of that changed. On 13 August, the school district once again offered to extend her contract for another year by sending her essentially the same contract and set of certifications she has received and signed at the end of each year since 2009. She was prepared to sign her contract renewal until she noticed one new, and extremely significant, addition: a certification she was required to sign pledging that she "does not currently boycott Israel", that she "will not boycott Israel during the term of the contract", and that she shall refrain from any action "that is intended to penalise, inflict economic harm on, or limit commercial

relations with Israel, or with a person or entity doing business in Israeli or in an Israel-controlled territory". The language of the affirmation Amawi was told she must sign reads like Orwellian – or McCarthyite – self-parody, the classic political loyalty oath that every American should instinctively shudder upon reading: *Pursuant to Section 2270.001 of Texas Government Code, the Contractor affirms that it: 1. Does not currently boycott Israel; and 2. Will not boycott Israel during the term of the contract. Pursuant to Section 2270.001 of the Texas Government Code: 1. 'Boycott Israel' means refusing to deal with, terminating business activities with, or otherwise taking any action that is intended to penalise, inflict economic harm on, or limit commercial relations specifically with Israel, or with a person or entity doing business in Israel or in any Israeli-controlled territory, but does not include an action made for ordinary business purposes ...* That language would bar Amawi not only from refraining from buying goods from companies located within Israel, but also from any Israeli companies operating in the occupied West Bank ('an Israeli-controlled territory'). The oath given to Amawi would also likely prohibit her even from advocating such a boycott, given that such speech could be seen as 'intended to penalise, inflict economic harm on, or limit commercial relations with Israel' ... This required certification about Israel was the only one in the contract sent to Amawi that pertained to political opinions and activism. There were no similar clauses relating to children (such as a vow not to advocate for paedophiles or child abusers), nor were there any required political oaths that pertained to the country of which she is a citizen and where she lives and works: the United States.

Criminalising support for Palestine

In order to obtain contracts in Texas, then, a citizen is free to denounce and work against the United States, to advocate for causes that directly harm American children, and even to support a boycott of particular US states, such as [was done in 2017 to North Carolina](#) in protest of its anti-LGBT law. In order to continue to work, Amawi would be perfectly free to engage in any political activism against her own country,

participate in an economic boycott of any state or city within the US, or work against the policies of any other government in the world – except Israel ... Amawi concluded that she could not truthfully or in good faith sign the oath because, in conjunction with her family, she has made the household decision to refrain from purchasing goods from Israeli companies in support of the global boycott to end Israel's decades-long occupation of the West Bank [and Gaza](#). Amawi, as the mother of four young children and a professional speech pathologist, is not a leader of any political movements: she has simply made the consumer choice to support the boycott by avoiding the purchase of products from Israeli companies in Israel or the occupied West Bank. She also occasionally participates in peaceful activism in defence of Palestinian self-determination that includes advocacy of the global boycott to end the Israeli occupation ... Because Amawi, to her knowledge, is the only certified Arabic-speaking child's speech pathologist in the district, it is quite possible that the refusal to renew her contract will leave dozens of young children with speech pathologies without any competent expert to evaluate their conditions and treatment needs ... The anti-BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] Israel oath was included in Amawi's contract papers due to [an Israel-specific state law](#) enacted on 2 May 2017 by the Texas state legislature and signed into law two days later ... The bill's language is so sweeping that some victims of Hurricane Harvey, which devastated southwest Texas in late 2017, [were told](#) that they could only receive state disaster relief if they first [signed a pledge never to boycott Israel](#). That demand was deeply confusing to those hurricane victims in desperate need of help but who could not understand what their views of Israel and Palestine had to do with their ability to receive assistance from their state government ... The vast majority of American citizens are therefore now officially barred from supporting a boycott of Israel without incurring some form of sanction or limitation imposed by their state. And the relatively few Americans who are still free to form views on this hotly contested political debate without being officially punished are in danger of losing that freedom, as more and more states are poised to enact similar censorship schemes ...

Where are the defenders of free speech?

Meanwhile, though, there is an entire pundit class that has made very lucrative careers from posing as defenders and crusaders for free speech ... who fall notoriously silent whenever censorship is aimed at critics of Israel ... CNN's

[recent firing of Marc Lamont Hill](#) due to his pro-Palestine speech ... produced not a word of protest from this crowd. The same was true of the University of Illinois's costly decision to [rescind a teaching offer](#) to Palestinian-American professor Steven Salaita for the thought-crime of condemning Israel's bombing of Gaza. But as The Intercept has [repeatedly documented](#), the [most frequent victims of official campus censorship](#) are not conservative polemicists but pro-Palestinian activists, and the [greatest and most severe threat](#) posed to free speech throughout the west is aimed at Israel critics – from the [arresting of French citizens](#) for the 'crime' of wearing "Boycott Israel" T-shirts to Canadian boycott activists being [overtly threatened with prosecution](#) to the [partial British criminalisation](#) of the boycott of Israel. Put simply, it is impossible to be a credible, effective, genuine advocate of free speech and free discourse without objecting to the organised, orchestrated, sustained onslaught of attacks on the free speech and free association rights undertaken specifically to protect the Israeli government from criticism and activism. Self-professed free speech defenders who only invoke that principle when [their political allies are targeted](#) are, by definition, charlatans and frauds. Genuine free speech advocates object to censorship even when – arguably especially when – the free speech [rights of their political adversaries](#) are assaulted. Anyone who stands by silently while Bahia Amawi is forced out of the profession she has worked so hard to construct all because of her refusal to renounce her political views and activism – while the young children she helps are denied the professional support they need and deserve – can legitimately and accurately call themselves many things. 'Free speech supporter' is most definitely not one of them.

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