

University of Minnesota rescinds offer to professor over criticisms of Gaza genocide

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On Friday, June 7, the University of Minnesota halted indefinitely its search for a director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, just days after it had offered the position to Raz Segal, an Israeli historian and current professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Endowed Professor of Modern Genocide Studies at Stockton University in New Jersey.

The move by the university came after two current members of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies' advisory board, Karen Painter and Bruno Chaouat, both professors at the university, resigned in protest over Segal's criticism of Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in occupied Gaza.

This decision comes amidst a frontal assault by the ruling class on the democratic rights of those opposed to the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Students, artists, academics and professionals have faced harsh punishment for daring to speak out against Israel's actions or continued US support of the genocide. In May, over 3,000 students, professors and academic staff were arrested for protesting the genocide in Gaza on college campuses and throughout American cities.

In separate emailed letters of resignation to Provost Rachel Croson and Interim President Jeff Ettinger, Chaouat and Painter claimed Segal was "supporting Hamas" and that he was engaging in "indirect support of antisemitism." Chaouat declared, "Professor Segal, by justifying Hamas' atrocities five days after they occurred, cannot fulfill the mission of the center."

Segal was one of the first renowned public academics to describe Israel's attacks in Gaza as a genocide. He also unequivocally condemned the attacks carried out by Hamas. In a commentary published in *The Guardian* October 24 under the headline, "Israel must stop weaponising the Holocaust," Segal wrote:

A powerful state, with powerful allies and a powerful army, engaged in a retaliatory attack against stateless Palestinians under Israeli-settler colonial rule, military occupation and siege, is thus portrayed as powerless Jews in a struggle against Nazis. This historical context in no way justifies or excuses the mass murder of 1,500 Israelis on 7 October, which constitutes a war crime and crimes against humanity. This was the single largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, which deeply shocked Jews and many others around the world.

The attacks on Segal are mounting. Mark Rotenberg, vice president of Hillel International—a Jewish campus organization which describes itself as "steadfastly committed to the support of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders"—claimed that Segal's appointment "severely degraded the academic integrity of the department."

He added, "It's terribly distressing to see the Department of Holocaust and Genocide Studies led by an anti-Israel propagandist rather than a top scholar in the history of the eradication of European Jewry."

The decision comes amidst some of the most horrendous massacres of the genocide, including the Nuseirat refugee camp slaughter, which killed almost 300 Palestinians and injured over 700 more. It comes weeks after the Israeli army decided to invade Rafah, crossing a supposed "red line" for the Biden administration, with US support, endangering over a million lives in the only remaining untouched areas of the Gaza Strip.

The absurd attacks on Segal are belied by his scholarship on genocide and Holocaust studies, which is recognized internationally, including in Israel.

After studying at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, he moved on to receive an M.A. in history from Tel Aviv University and then continued his studies at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. He has received multiple fellowships and awards for his work during the course of his career, such as a Harry Frank Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship and a Lady Davis Fellowship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

He has published multiple books on the Holocaust. In recognition of his scholarship, one of his books, *Days of Ruin: The Jews of Munkács During the Holocaust*, was published by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to victims of the Holocaust.

Other notable works cover the periods preceding and during World War II. He has also made several contributions to the study of genocides and the Holocaust in history to journals such as the *Journal of Holocaust Studies* over the past decades, including a notable recent publication in March earlier this year on the ongoing genocide in Gaza, *Gaza as Twilight of Israel Exceptionalism: Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Unprecedented Crisis to Unprecedented Change*.

In the week following the beginning of Israel's operation in Gaza, he published a blog post titled, "A Textbook Case of Genocide." In this article, he poses the question, "Israel has been explicit about what it's carrying out in Gaza. Why isn't the world

listening?” He continues:

Israel’s campaign to displace Gazans—and potentially expel them altogether into Egypt—is yet another chapter in the Nakba, in which an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes during the 1948 war that led to the creation of the State of Israel. But the assault on Gaza can also be understood in other terms: as a textbook case of genocide unfolding in front of our eyes. I say this as a scholar of genocide, who has spent many years writing about Israeli mass violence against Palestinians. I have written about settler colonialism and Jewish supremacy in Israel, the distortion of the Holocaust to boost the Israeli arms industry, the weaponization of antisemitism accusations to justify Israeli violence against Palestinians, and the racist regime of Israeli apartheid. Now, following Hamas’s attack on Saturday and the mass murder of more than 1,000 Israeli civilians, the worst of the worst is happening.

In the article, he cites the words of Israeli representatives, including Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, who explicitly declared the genocidal intent of Israel’s operation just two days following the Hamas attack on the Nova music festival. He noted that perpetrators of genocide in history have rarely expressed their intent so clearly as is happening now in Israel.

Despite the attacks on academics and professionals, Segal maintained a principled stance on Israel’s genocide. In December last year, he was interviewed on “Breaking Points,” where he denounced Israel’s ongoing aggression against Palestinians in Gaza and the continued genocidal incitement in Israeli society. He clarified, “I’m talking about, you know, huge signs hanging on the bridges of the Tel Aviv Freeway right after the 7th of October, calling to flatten Gaza, to destroy Gaza, written on them directly that the ‘image of triumph would be zero people in Gaza.’ Very direct, very explicit.” This is in addition to his identification of Israeli apartheid, a stance which he maintains.

In an interview conducted in May by New Jersey Spotlight News, Segal defended student protests against the genocide, denouncing the absurd claims of antisemitism and violence by the media and politicians.

I think that anyone who visits the many “Gaza Solidarity Encampments” now on campuses across the U.S. sees that these accusations are baseless ... it’s rooted historically. There have been accusations in the Jewish world among Jews that some Jews are not actually Jews. But these historically actually have been wielded by ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox rabbis against Zionists in their communities.

The entire political establishment—with the Democratic Party at the helm, supported by their fascistic Republican counterparts—has

hurled baseless accusations of “antisemitism” in an attempt to silence opposition to the ongoing genocide.

The University of Minnesota’s decision to rescind Segal’s offer is occurring against the backdrop of continued attacks on democratic rights and free speech by US media, politicians and multiple employers against employees speaking out. This is also in the context of the Democratic Party’s rapid escalation of war not only in the Middle East but in Ukraine against Russia and threats against China. The same Democratic Party establishment and media denouncing protests against the obvious genocide in Palestine as “antisemitic” are now supporting self-admitted antisemites in Ukraine, such as the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. This fascistic group was just cleared to receive more direct support from the Biden administration, which had previously cited it as a hate group.

The Democratic and Republican parties view the massive and growing opposition to Israel’s genocide in Gaza as a critical threat to plans for a wider war, which the ruling class sees as the only way out of the economic crisis facing global capitalism. As the threat of war grows, the Biden administration is intensifying repression at home. It has criminalized protests, carrying out mass arrests of students, workers and young people. The violence directed at the opposition is a sign of the level of fear within ruling circles that the movement will spread to the working class.

University students, graduate workers, and staff should come to the defense of Professor Segal and demand the university move forward with his hire. The attempt to silence Segal must be seen as part of a broader attack against students, workers and democratic rights. The growing demand to stop Israel’s genocide in Gaza must be combined with a struggle against the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and against dictatorship and social inequality.



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