



Israel Gets Georgia to Strip Free Speech Rights (Again)

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Abby Martin: Welcome to The Empire Files, I'm Abby Martin. In case you're not familiar with this case, please check the links in the description below for more information. Long story short, back in 2020, I was barred from speaking at Georgia Southern University because Georgia is one of dozens of states across the country with anti-BDS or Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel laws on the books. In order to speak there I was asked to sign a loyalty oath to Israel, pledging to never supporter or advocate for the BDS movement as a staunch advocate for Palestinian human rights I refused to sign the contract. Instead, I filed a lawsuit to sue the state for violating my First Amendment rights with the hope of getting the law overturned. And in May of 2021, on the heels of another vicious Israeli onslaught in Gaza, Georgia Federal District Court Judge Mark Cohen ruled in my favour. This was a huge victory and added to the precedent set by legal challenges against these unjust laws in other states. This, of course, outraged the Israeli government, which lashed out on social media and went to work trying to overturn our victory. These laws were on the books in the first place, not because of the desire of the American people, but because of the desire of the Israeli lobby. But once a judge deemed Georgia's law unconstitutional, Israeli officials openly worked with Georgia's politicians to request that the law be changed, not repealed. This is not even hidden. Check out how crazy this is. In the actual legislative session an Israeli government official was present, the state legislature officials even admitted that this Israeli official was the one that asked them to change the law, and they complied, in a shocking act of foreign subversion. I was completely taken aback by how openly Georgia's politicians were literally acting on behalf of a foreign power to restrict the constitutional rights of American citizens. So, as promised, Israel and the Georgia legislature came back with an amended law to try to move my case. On January 27th they voted to amend the law I sued over so that only individuals and businesses with a contract for over \$100,000 are required to sign the Israel loyalty oath. This anti-Palestinian pro apartheid amendment was passed overwhelmingly, with 146 yes votes and only nine no votes. Showing how strong the hold of the Israeli lobby is on our government. Shameful. Absolutely shameful. These politicians

knew that a judge had already ruled that the law violates the very constitution they take an oath to protect, but they didn't care. That's how beholden these politicians are to money and power. They're frauds. But here's the thing. The law is still ruled unconstitutional. It is still unenforceable in the state of Georgia. No one will have to sign this pro-Israel pledge in order to work for the state for contracts under 100 grand. But if any individual or business with over \$100,000 in contracts refuses to sign it, it would still be deemed unconstitutional to try to punish them under this law. So my legal precedent still holds. And the only thing this amendment accomplished was finding a way to keep the language on the books. Basically a propaganda victory so Israel can erroneously claim they defeated my lawsuit. So what does this mean? While the pro-Israel crew is happy, they can claim to have made my lawsuit irrelevant because they stopped the law from being repealed by simply modifying it and they're completely counting on the fact that no business with big contracts will follow suit and continue to challenge the law. Of course, even though the law is still unconstitutional and thereby unenforceable, it is still criminal that it's on the books at all and clearly will still have a chilling effect on those who may feel they have no choice but to choose between their free speech rights and the ability to work in Georgia. This is not about me. It's about all of us and the guiding principles that supposedly make our country great for as much as the corporate media and political establishment cry about censorship and free speech. There's barely any discussion about these outrageous laws that exist in more than half the country. The crackdown on Palestine, solidarity and pro-Palestine speech is one of the biggest threats to the First Amendment today, and these laws are part of Israel's strategy to criminalise peaceful activity and speech that undermines their legitimacy. When will this country wake up to this egregious assault on our civil liberties? When will Americans become outraged that a foreign government is actually removing our constitutional rights? Amnesty International has become the latest mainstream human rights organisation to deem Israel an apartheid state, which was another heavy blow to the Israeli propaganda machine. So let's keep pushing the momentum forward to support the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement. And that means making sure this law is completely struck from the books not only in Georgia, but everywhere. I'm not giving up on overturning this law in Georgia, and I will be exploring the next legal steps to do so. Because no state or politician can hold back the tide of justice we know is coming for a free Palestine.

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