

Jewish Students at NYC College Urged To Hide in Library Attic to Escape Unruly Pro-Hamas Mob

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Daniella Kahane Friday, October 27, 2023

Cooper Union, a small private university in New York City's East Village, is suddenly at center stage in what is shaping up to be a national debate over antisemitism on American college campuses and free speech on campus.

Jewish students at the college found themselves locked in a school library Wednesday night — told to take shelter in an attic no less — by guards attempting to protect them from a mob of pro-Hamas students outside.

Already on edge, like many Jewish students across the country, the Jewish Cooper Union students had been warning the administration, emailing the deans for the past two weeks, that the rising aggressions against Jewish students would get out of hand.

Earlier that day, a professor had canceled class and encouraged students to attend the pro-Hamas rally meant to challenge a planned pro-Israel event, even offering extra credit for those who participated.

Students from both groups were instructed by the administration that both rallies were to remain outside school buildings, an edict ignored by the pro-Hamas students, who marched into the library chanting "From the River to the Sea Palestine Will Be Free."

A sophomore at Cooper Union who had been at the pro-Israel rally, Taylor Roslyn Lent, says she called police immediately when she saw the pro-Hamas students enter the building. Police arriving a few minutes later stood on the sidelines.

The Pro-Hamas students went searching for the President of the University, Laura Sparks, who apparently had been shuttled by guards out a back passageway, when the shouting students entered the building.

At about 4:45 p.m., the Jewish students in the library were told by guards that they needed to lock themselves in if they wanted to remain safe. A librarian, also fearing for the students, offered to hide them in the attic of the building, an area not normally accessible to students.

The Pro-Hamas students banged on the doors, screaming, "Free Palestine, Let Us In." At 4:47 Ms. Lent called 911 a second time after seeing the officers outside drive off. The police said they would send someone back. To her knowledge, no police ever came.

"We were scared and a student was crying... I can't help but think what would have happened if we opened those doors," Ms. Lent tells the Sun. Finally, after about 30

minutes, security was able to force the rallying students out of the building, and Ms. Lent and the other barricaded students were able to exit a back doorway.

Sari Ancona, whose daughter is a graduate student at Cooper Union and was one of the students trapped in the library, says her daughter no longer feels safe going to class at Cooper Union.

In a press conference held by the NYPD on Thursday, Chief of Patrol John Chell contradicted the students' experience, saying, "There was no direct threat, there was no damage and there was no danger to any students in that school... the students were not barricaded... A school administrator thought it was prudent to close the doors."

At a separate press conference Thursday, the Lawfare Project and a New York City councilwoman, Inna Vernikov, called for the president of Cooper Union, Ms. Sparks, to be fired or to step down.

A senior counsel at the Lawfare Project, Gerard Filitti, said Jewish students have the right to a campus experience free from intimidation. "When they are being targeted for their Jewish identity this is illegal, [and] a violation of the civil rights act," he said. "Schools have the obligation to protect their students."

"Yes we want academic freedom," he added. "But when it crosses the line, when people are banging on a library window with what looks like a weapon in their hand, that crosses the line, that's conduct that is illegal... we need to hold the university accountable."

<https://www.nysun.com/article/jewish-students-at-nyc-college-urged-to-hide-in-library-attic-to-escape-unruly-pro-hamas-mob>