

Anti-Semitism rears its ugly head at McGill University

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Anti-Semitism is an escalating global problem, and no objective observer denies it. There are many contributing factors, but a common two-ply thread is the demonization of the state of Israel as an all-evil oppressor and the Palestinians as an all-innocent oppressed people. The obsession rises to its crescendo on university campuses, where fulltime hate-fuelled activists plow their Israel-delegitimization furrow without surcease via the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

BDS has failed to achieve many of its stated goals, such as forcing universities to divest financially from Israel or boycotting scholars from Israel (they have no power to do either in any case, no matter how many resolutions they pass). But they have made great headway in their unstated goal, which is to normalize the concept of Israel as a moral pariah state, and to create a climate of fear amongst Jewish students who are justly proud of their homeland's democratic character and high achievements, but are too intimidated, thanks to relentless BDS pressure—psychologically and even literally in many cases—to express their pride.

For many years, extreme anti-Zionists indignantly denied that their hatred for Israel was a form of anti-Semitism. People of good faith struggled to believe this was true. But there has been too much ugliness in the BDS to keep that flimsy veil in place. Even Justin Trudeau, usually better known as a fence-straddler than an outright Israel supporter, has been forthright in his denunciation as BDS.

University administrators are rightly alarmed by the creeping pall of BDS menace that shadows their campuses, and, encouraged by the Canadian government's signing-on to the Working Definition of Anti-Semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IRHA) in 2015, they have adopted it for their own purposes. Amongst the examples the IRHA definition offers as an expression of hatred toward Jews are these: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor;" and "Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation." At McGill University, the principal vehicle for disseminating Israel hatred is the McGill Daily, which is frequently guilty of the forms of anti-Semitism described above. The Daily has always been inclined to far-left ideology, and extreme anti-Zionism has been an integral component of the far left for many decades. The Daily, which is funded by student fees, receiving \$300,000 annually, makes no secret of its bias, rather takes pride in it, constantly publishing diatribes against Israel, but refusing to accept pro-Israel counterpoint articles.

Last week the Canadian Jewish News reported that at the beginning of the academic year, the Daily announced its definition of Zionism as "represent[ing] a racist attitude and violent practice against Palestinians" that "only recognizes Israeli/Jewish hegemony and legitimacy to self-determination in Palestine." A link to a BDS site was provided to readers. Two McGill law students, Michael Aareau and Josh Shapiro, submitted a rebuttal, in it contending the Daily definition was "not only factually inaccurate, but malicious as well," and further stating that "Zionism is the national movement of the Jewish people to express their right to self-determination," which the Daily turned away. The letter-writers appealed to university administrators, arguing the discrimination was a violation of the Daily's letters policy.

Deputy Provost Fabrice Labeau supported their claim and intervened, threatening, if they did not, arbitration that could have resulted in the de-funding of the Daily. The Daily caved, resulting in the rebuttal letter being published (in deliberately small font) in their Nov 4 issue, but accompanied by an editorial apologizing for its appearance and protesting "administrative interference." In it, the Daily thanked Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) and Independent Jewish Voices McGill (IJV) for help in composing their vicious response to the rebuttal, which included accusations of ethnic cleansing on Israel's part and "violent occupation."

Both SPHR and IJV are hard-core pillars of the BDS movement, which is in essence exterminationist: that is, BDS has for its goal not a two-state solution, but a one-state solution, a Palestinian state in which Jews would become a minority and might or might not have rights or even security. Neither group admits any inherent Jewish claims whatsoever on their ancestral land, in itself a form of anti-Semitism.

Several community groups have issued a call to action by the university. Media watch group, Honest Reporting Canada, has asked McGill's administration to conduct a formal investigation into the Daily and to take action to "ensure it ceases its anti-Israel animus and avowed discriminatory practices." Hasbara Fellowship Canada commended the Deputy Provost for his treatment of the affair, and CIJA (Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs) condemned the Daily, pledging continued support for affected students. Rabbi Reuben Poupko, CIJA co-chair, stated, "It is painfully ironic that those who claim to

advocate for diversity have been exposed as censors of opinions with which they disagree.”

Anti-Zionism/anti-Semitism has been given wide latitude on campus on grounds of freedom of speech, but also because Jews are perceived as “privileged” and therefore ineligible for claims to victimhood under any circumstances. As a result, Jews are assaulted by constant messages of Israel hatred, from which there is no escape: in their public spaces, such as the Daily’s constant barrage of accusations, and in their private spaces, as in the toxically anti-Israel social media they are exposed to, and in their classrooms, where anti-Zionism is shamelessly bruited by many far-left academics.

Jews are not a monolithic group by any means. But they share one common experience. Most Jews attend a university and at an age when they are absorbing the ideas that will guide their attitudes and even their life trajectories.

Increasingly, young Jews are being subjected to a form of involuntary indoctrination, including hate speech, regarding an existential tenet of their religion and sense of peoplehood. All too many of them are emerging with a feeling of shame in being associated with a state they have been taught – or rather taken in by osmosis – is the “Jew amongst the nations.”

There is a cancer on our campuses and the Daily is one big reason why it is metastasizing. This is common knowledge. Hand-wringing over the problem has gone on for too long. The time for action, including defunding of the Daily or the establishment of a rival newspaper that receives equal funding, has come.