



David B Dewitt
<ddewitt@yorku.ca>
05/22/2009 09:37 AM

To lawdean@osgoode.yorku.ca, "Stan Shapson"
<sshapson@edu.yorku.ca>
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: 2ND ARTICLE: YORK UNIVERSITY VS. ISRAEL:
?ACADEMIC FREEDOM? OR ACADEMIC FARCE?

FYI. Don't know where he intends to post this.

David B. Dewitt
Associate Vice-President Research
(Social Sciences & Humanities)
Professor of Political Science
Centre for International & Security Studies
York University, Toronto Canada M3J 1P3
E-mail: ddewitt@yorku.ca
AVP Research Tel: 416-736-5780 Fax: 416-650-8197
Website www.research.yorku.ca
YCISS Tel: 416-736-5156 Fax: 416-736-5752

This electronic mail is intended only for the recipient(s) to whom it is addressed. It may contain information that is privileged, confidential and/or exempt from disclosure by law. No waiver of privilege, of confidentiality or of any other protection is intended by virtue of its communication by the internet. Any unauthorized use, dissemination or copying is strictly prohibited. If you have received this mail in error, or are not named as a recipient, please immediately notify the sender and destroy all copies of it.

— Forwarded by David B Dewitt/fs/YorkU on 05/22/09 09:35 AM —

"Gerald M. Steinberg"
<steing@mail.blu.ac.il>

05/22/09 03:29 AM

To David Dewitt <ddewitt@YorkU.CA>
cc
Subject 2ND ARTICLE: YORK UNIVERSITY VS. ISRAEL: "ACADEMIC FREEDOM" OR
1 ACADEMIC FARCE?

Draft for comment before blog posting: 22 May 2009

**YORK UNIVERSITY VS. ISRAEL:
"ACADEMIC FREEDOM" OR ACADEMIC FARCE?**

Gerald M. Steinberg
Chair, Political Science, Bar Ilan University
and Executive Director, NGO Monitor

IF THE HYPERLINKS WITH SOURCES ARE MISSING FROM THIS COPY, CLICK [HERE](#)

The President of York University in Toronto has issued a statement attempting to defend his university's sponsorship of an event headlined "Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace", scheduled for June 22 to 24. This response to intense criticism of the program attempts to portray serious criticism as an attack on academic freedom. However, in examining the details and the debate over this event, and in the context of vulgar anti-Israel activities and physical intimidation of Jewish students at York, these bland words are a diversion -- a straw man aimed at deflecting criticism, and blocking the important public debate over the role of university campuses as battlefields in the Arab-Israeli narrative wars that perpetuate the violent conflict.

York's defense seeks to answer the public statement issued by Hershell Ezrin, head of the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA). This analysis was based on a careful examination of the speakers and their topics, which reveals that this conference "aims to explore a one-state, bi-national solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the imposition of which would spell the end of Israel as a Jewish state. The conference will include a number of speakers who are recognizable for their roles as organizers and outspoken proponents of 'Israel apartheid week' and the Israel boycott movement."

Far from an attack on academic freedom, such criticism highlights the very absence of the free exchange in a marketplace of ideas which is the indispensable foundation for academic freedom. The extremely complex history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and multiple dimensions of peace efforts contrast starkly with the narrowly constricted ideologies reflected in the list of 44 speakers. This information is readily available using the internet, and had the eleven sponsors -- six from York, four from Queen's university and a government funded research framework -- exercised "due diligence", they would have found that many of the speakers are virulent anti-Israeli activists, and are far removed from academic work to understand complex issues through research and debate. In other words, it is the conference that constitutes a brutal attack on academic freedom, rather than the analysts and critics.

For example, the first speaker on the list is Ali Abunimah, who runs a propaganda internet site known as the "Electronic Intifada", specializing in demonization of Israel through articles such as "Why Israel won't survive". Abunimah is also affiliated with a political organization (PCHR) based in Gaza that systematically distorts and exploits the language of human rights -- also to attack Israel. Abunimah's groups frequently condone Palestinian terrorism using the euphemism of "resistance" and terms like "apartheid" and "racist" in reference to Israel -- the exact opposite of promoting compromise and a two state solution. Attempts to feature speakers like Abunimah under the banner of peace research is dishonest, and rather than attempting to prevent this criticism by pretending that academic freedom is at stake, York university officials should welcome the analysis

While the ideological bios and activist records of all 44 speakers would fill dozens of pages (a

task that the sponsors at York University should undertake as a public service), a few more illustrations are useful. Jeff Halper is another veteran pro-Palestinian campaigner, far removed from any academic pursuits. He runs a small organization that claims to oppose the demolition of Palestinian houses, but most of his activities are aimed at generating support for the Palestinian narrative. He recently participated in sailing a few small boats from Cyprus to Hamas-controlled Gaza, hoping to engage in publicity-generating confrontations with the Israeli Navy. Halper often appears in support of Naim Ateek, whose speeches include classical antisemitic references, such as accusing Israel of "crucifying Palestinians". The context of Palestinian mass terror attacks, the mangled bodies, and the hatred against Israelis that promotes this inhuman behavior, is entirely erased.

An Israeli columnist recently witnessed Halper urging "his Muslim listeners in an American university to reject the Arab Peace Initiative, because it serves the Muslim tyrants. He told his listeners that Israel is actually a force that serves world capitalism, in the framework of the attempt to make enormous populations in the world disappear. The antisemites could not have said it better." To label such activities as promoting peace or remotely connected to university discourse is an insult to intelligent people. Recently, Halper's main benefactor, the European Union, rejected his application for renewed funding, but York University – for reasons yet to be explained – is giving him the façade of academic legitimacy.

Amidst the long list of speakers, there are also few genuine academics – whom critics might dismiss as fig leaves for the hard-core propagandists -- but even here, the ideological range runs from strongly critical of Israel (but accepting the legitimacy of Jewish sovereign equality) to extremely critical (one-state promoters, tantamount to "wiping Israel off the map".) Although there are many academics whose research goes beyond one-dimensional Israel-bashing, and examines the failures of Arab, Palestinian, and Moslem leaders to contribute to peace making, these dimensions are conspicuously absent from the program. In this Orwellian twist, the use of "academic freedom" is a mask for the crude censorship at York.

With so many obvious distortions, the defense offered by the President of York University is a farce. Without a free market of ideas, academic freedom, and even the concept of a university, is meaningless. Given a conference which fails to even hint at the complexity of the issues, the result is not censorship, but the transformation of the university into a macabre circus that sells hatred, martyrdom and murder.

In a free society, the circus, like the university, is open to all – as P.T. Barnum observed, "There's a sucker born every minute". But in the Middle East, such farces will only serve to fuel the vicious warfare and mass terror which has taken the lives of tens of thousands of Israelis, Palestinians, and others, and is escalating into nuclear confrontation. And York University has



become an accomplice in this crime. YORK UNIVERSITY VS ISRAEL.doc