

The insidious BDS campaign trying to undermine our universities

By Conrad Black

As the United States officially abandons the diversity, equity and inclusion agenda as the institutionalized bigotry that most of it is, and Harvard University has banned reasonably defined antisemitism and is incorporating the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, Canadian academia appears to be resolutely accelerating in the opposite direction. In recent months, activists from the



A sign is seen urging the university's pension plan to divest from companies that do business with Israel, at the encampment set up at the University of Toronto in May 2024. PHOTO BY JESSE KLINE/NATIONAL POST

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the United Steelworkers (USW) university locals, promoting boycott, divestment and sanctions policies against

Israel, have been pressuring faculty associations at the University of Toronto and other Ontario universities, demanding "responsible investing" by the University Pension Plan (UPP), which holds \$11.7 billion in assets for the 41,000 working and retired members of the plan.

A document put together for a November information session for faculty and staff at the University of Toronto, which was provided to me by a well-informed recipient, details the insidious campaign to libel the State of Israel and pressure the UPP into divesting from companies that are even remotely associated with the Jewish state. This virtual call to arms begins with the now almost unavoidable incantation that the University of Toronto is subject to the " 'Dish With One Spoon' Wampum Belt Covenant between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to protect the land and resources around the Great Lakes. As we gather here today, these nations continue to experience ongoing colonization and displacement – where land acknowledgements are offered in place of land itself." This effectively confirms my long-standing belief that the apostles of Caucasian guilt would finally accuse Canada and the United States of being illegal occupiers and declare that the conduct of their ancestors on this continent was legally indistinguishable from that of Hitler and Stalin invading Poland in 1939.

There were approximately 200,000 Aboriginals in Canada at the time of the initial European arrival nearly 500 years ago, most of whom were nomads. The idea that North America was a populated and coherently administered jurisdiction that has been systematically invaded, occupied and colonized is utter nonsense. And if it is really the view of the members of the branches of CUPE and the USW who have endorsed these views and are pushing them on the University of Toronto Faculty Association that the territory around the Great Lakes should be given back to the descendants of the Iroquois and the Ojibwe, then they should focus on advocating that rather than pestilentially badgering their membership with absurd demands about the investment of UPP funds. The organizing principle of these hard-line activists pivots on the entirely false claim that UPP "holdings are providing direct and material support to Israel's illegal occupation, apartheid and genocide in Palestine." This unctuous assertion is accompanied by a pious promise to "agree to not participate in speech or conduct that is racist, colonialist, imperialist or that discriminates on

the grounds of religion, language or national and ethnic origin." Readers are informed that the fourth item on the appendix of the investment exclusion list is Russia because of its "breaches of international law." The document cites a press release by some "United Nations human rights experts" on June 20, 2024, saying that, "The transfer of weapons and ammunition to Israel may constitute serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws and risk state complicity in international crimes, possibly including genocide."

Thus a group of "experts" servicing the propaganda purposes of the vehemently anti-Israel UN Human Rights Office called upon a number of prominent American defence contractors to cease any sales of their products to Israel. The "legal context" is given as a summary of an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice that "Israeli settlements and use of natural resources in the Palestinian territories is (sic) a clear violation of international law." The international Court of Justice is a fraudulent organization thoroughly dominated by countries that show no respect whatever for the rule of law or the rights of their own citizens or anyone else. An advisory opinion has no weight whatever and this particular opinion completely ignores the unceasing efforts of the last 77 years by the principal Palestinian organizations to revoke Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, which was declared by the United Nations in 1948, and to submit the Jewish population of that country once again to subjugation, expulsion or genocidal massacre. No borders for a Palestinian entity have ever been agreed upon and successive Palestinian leaders have effectively rejected all efforts that Israel has made to establish a Palestinian state, so these unappeasable activists are aggressively assisting an effort to exterminate the State of Israel and to do to the 74 per cent Jewish majority population of that state what they falsely claim Israel is attempting to do to the Palestinians. The information paper – dated Nov. 13, 2024 – claims that \$790 million of published UPP pension holdings are invested "in companies linked to the Israeli military assault, apartheid and illegal occupation in Palestine." It might surprise their shareholders to learn that those companies include Amazon, Bank of Montreal, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola,

Chevron, Hyundai, ABB and Expedia. The logical next step is to condemn anyone who has an occasional Coke or Pepsi or an account at the Bank of Montreal or uses Expedia to make a hotel reservation or puts Chevron gasoline in the tank of his car of being an accomplice in genocide and lesser offences such as colonialism (which has often been a constructive activity).

The concluding summary of this asinine document repeats the lies that Israel is operating an "illegal military apartheid state in Palestine." The opening military assault, without which almost none of what is objected to would have happened, was the Hamas invasion of Israel and the massacre of 1,200 Israelis on Oct. 7, 2023. Israel is not an apartheid state and the Arab minority is fully represented in the Israeli parliament and the Israeli presence in Palestinian-majority territories is a justifiable reaction to the savage violation of an agreed ceasefire and the deliberate and barbarous massacre of 1,200 Israelis, most of them civilians, and many women and children. There is room for legitimate dispute about some of the Israeli settlements, but only in the context of numerous "land-for-peace" agreements after wars the Arabs initiated and lost, and then reduced the "peace" agreements into ceasefires that they quickly violated. It is a tiresome but time-honoured tradition that academic groups frequently champion absurd causes. But falsely to accuse the national state of the people that have been the most conspicuous victims of mass genocide in all the history of genocide when it acts in self-defence painfully illustrates the moral bankruptcy and intellectual corruption of much of our academy. The conduct of these militants influencing the University of Toronto Faculty Association and its affiliates in this matter, and of all those guilty of abetting or even tolerating the propagation of these racist smears, is an unutterable disgrace.

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