

# University of Toronto Should Immediately Remove Encampment and Lay Charges Where Appropriate

From Conrad Black

Approximately 80 faculty members, staff, and students at the University of Toronto have issued an open letter to the president of the university, Meric Gertler, expressing their concern about the university's response to anti-Israel and anti-Semitic agitation and specifically asking him how he intends to respond.



The signatories of the letter, [published in the Toronto Star](#) on May 18, accepted the right of peaceful protest, but stated that the protesters' encampment on the U of T campus is

contrary to established university policy and to principles enumerated in respect of this controversy by the administration. They also said the encampment does not respect private property and presents a safety and security risk, while disrupting the academic environment and affecting the well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

The signatories pointed out that on May 2, the university administration stated that "Peaceful protest does not include the use of physical force, threats or intimidation, or the occupation of spaces that prevents their use by others. Hate speech, threats, and other discriminatory language or behaviour, do not constitute peaceful protest, and will not be tolerated on our campuses. Engaging in activities that contravene law or policies-such as remaining on the grounds or in buildings after notice to leave, or erecting structures, or barriers in outdoor spaces – can have potential consequences. All these principles have been violated."

They also reminded Mr. Gertler and other readers that on May 8, the university administration noted that it had seen: "hateful messages and speech, as well as altercations, fires, burning inside the encampment area, blocked reinforced exit points, and impeded routes around the perimeter of the encampment, significant tent and population density, non-university community members entering, leaving, or staying in the encampment overnight."

"It is crucial that you take swift action to end the encampment in accordance with the University of Toronto's policies, guidelines, and the law," the letter states. "This issue must be addressed in a way that prioritizes the well-being of all members of the university community, ensuring the campus remains a safe and conducive environment for learning and research. President Gertler, what are you prepared to do?"

The only satisfactory answer to that question is to take down and remove the encampment, and to cover the campus with security cameras sufficiently to ensure that those violating

the guidelines and laws or displaying expressions or incitements of racial hatred are penalized. Staff, faculty, and students who have committed violations should be suspended pending consideration of their fitness to continue, and others—including interlopers not connected to the university, of whom there are apparently many—should be prosecuted.

This entire movement is outrageous, and no less so for being a contemptible imitation of what is going on at many American campuses, except that on many of those campuses, the university and civic authorities have not hesitated before suppressing this unacceptable activity which desecrates places of tolerant learning and contravenes well-established and sensible rules.

It should be noted that almost none of this activity was conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas invasion of Israel on Oct. 7, in which over 1,000 people were massacred. And almost none of these trespassers and agitators were prepared to come forward at the outset in favour of Hamas, or at least of its murderous activity, barbarously conducted against the most vulnerable people—babies, children, women, and the elderly—all in violation of a long-standing ceasefire. It was only after Israel began its long-promised invasion of Gaza, with the purpose of eliminating Hamas as a terrorist organization, that there suddenly arose this extraordinarily militant hostility to Israel, and the endless sloganeering in favour of killing, subjugating, or expelling the entire 7.2 million Jewish population of Israel, which was established specifically as a homeland for the Jewish people by the United Nations in 1948.

The American experience, which appears to be replicated here, is that approximately half of these campus activists and militants have nothing to do with the universities where they are trespassing, and are effectively professional, or hired nihilists or agitators, for appropriate public occasions. This kind of hooliganism has nothing to do with the right to

demonstrate peacefully or for freedom of speech or expression—it is just mob intervention on the slenderest pretexts, and in favour of a universally recognized terrorist organization, which has for decades engaged in the most heinous and savage assaults upon the most vulnerable and unsuspecting Israeli civilians.

At least when there was great campus unrest in the 1960s in the United States, especially, it was on subjects of considerable and legitimate public controversy: the Vietnam War, and the state of civil rights in the United States. Many of the American male students demonstrating felt that they were liable to be conscripted and sent to a war which they purported not to regard as just.

These issues can be debated, but a manifestation of academic opposition was not implausible or entirely out of place. Even then, some of the principal American universities cravenly appeased these demonstrators, who engaged in considerable acts of vandalism and intimidation, such as at Columbia and the University of California. California Gov. Ronald Reagan was much admired for ordering that the central square at Berkeley be cleared by the national guard with fixed bayonets; no casualties resulted.

In the present circumstances, there is no excuse whatever for tolerating demonstrations on this scale and for an objectively despicable cause. It would also be uplifting to know that our university leaders are made of sterner stuff than those of 50 years ago, who scurried under the wing of the faculty and the students in a widespread and shameful display of invertebrate surrender.

Not just the students and faculty of the University of Toronto, but Canadians in general, are curious to see what President Gertler is “prepared to do.”

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