

University of Toronto takes a stand against the mob

By Conrad Black

With only five months of this year elapsed, I'm nominating the president of the University of Toronto, Meric Gertler, as the most distinguished Canadian personality of 2024. On May 2, the administration of the university he directs stated that it would not tolerate the use of physical force, threats, or intimidation, or the occupation of spaces that prevent their use by others on the campus of the university. Nor would hate speech, threats, and other discriminatory language or behaviour, which do not constitute peaceful protest, be tolerated on the campus. In gentle terms in the circumstances, but by the standards of contemporary university administrations here and elsewhere, commendably purposefully, the university declared that contravention of law or well-known university policies "can have potential consequences."



A woman walks between the tents in the pro-Palestinian encampment set up at the University of Toronto campus, in Toronto, Sunday, May 26, 2024. PHOTO BY FRANK GUNN /The Canadian Press

In a full-page advertisement in the Toronto Star, the Toronto Sun and National Post on May 18, almost 80 students and faculty and staff of the university signed an

open letter to President Gertler stating that all the principles enumerated above had been violated, that the encampment of anti-Israel protesters at King's College Circle was not peaceful protest and it recorded that on May 8, the University of Toronto administration affirmed that there had been hateful messages in speech and altercations, fires burning within the encampment area, blocked reinforced exit points and impeded routes around the perimeter of the encampment, and the entry in large numbers of non-university community individuals, some of them staying overnight in the encampment. It requested swift action and concluded: "President Gertler, what are you prepared to do?"

On May 24, Brian Schwartz, a University of Toronto professor, [wrote in National Post](#) that many of the protesters have no connection to the university but they demand that the University of Toronto divest from investments in Israel and sever scholarly ties with Israeli academics. He also cited media reportage and comment praising the protesters' support for human rights and compassion for Palestinians in Gaza. He

described the encampment at the University of Toronto as “an intimidating and sometimes violent event that, while professing to be anti-Israel rather than anti-Jewish, deepens problems of anti-Semitism on our campus.” He detailed a number of incidents that he witnessed that were all highly offensive to Jews, grossly inaccurate references to contemporary events in the Middle East, and completely unacceptable under declared university policy.

Professor Schwartz pointed out that many of the demonstrators are masked, avoiding accountability for their illegal conduct. He sadly but justifiably produced his tentative conclusion that “U. of T.’s wish to avoid confrontation seemingly outweighs its inclusivity policies, including its explicit commitment to protect its Jewish members from hate. This would not be tolerated for any other group... People on campus-not only Jews-have learned that hate speech, intimidation and bullying prevail over constructive debate in Canada’s largest academic institution. The University of Toronto, a bastion of high academic ideals for which I have been proud to serve, is currently not a safe space physically, intellectually or emotionally, for a specific and targeted population. By not acting, U. of T. is choosing in favour of the purveyors of hate, intimidation and silencing of free speech, empowering others who wish to promote their hateful agendas by trespassing on university-protected property and intimidating those who do not agree.” All awaited the decision of the president of the University, those hoping that for once a large university would unambiguously support the law, freedom of expression, and the official discouragement of incitements to racial hate and violence, as well as those who were mocking the well-known and entirely sensible laws and regulations that they violated with glee, enhanced by the anonymity furnished by their cowardly and ludicrous disguises.

Dr. Gertler is a Jew whose mother, a Czechoslovak, survived the Holocaust. He is an alumnus of McMaster, California (at

Berkeley), and Harvard Universities and is a geographer and urban planning expert. It may be reasonably assumed that the last thing that he wished was to have such a confrontation as this dumped in his lap, and he has assiduously avoided undiplomatic remarks while conducting good faith negotiations with the representatives of the unhappy campers at his university. He answered the question posed by the petitioners in the newspaper ad on May 18 when on May 28, the university filed for a court injunction to evict pro-Palestinian protesters and the authorization for the police at all levels to arrest and remove "persons, objects and structures" at the university encampment. With exquisite diplomacy his statement added that "we continue to engage in discussions with students representing those in the encampment and remain hopeful that we can reach an agreement and bring the unauthorized encampment to an end." The demonstrators had been served with a trespass notice a week before warning that students could be suspended, and participating faculty or staff could be fired. He has forthrightly offered to answer questions about investments and relationships but declined to be dictated to on these matters. This, at last, is leadership from a quarter where there has been little enough of it.

These pro-Palestinian demonstrations at universities are an unmitigated fraud. They are not protesting an occupation or supporting a resistance; they are implicitly agreeing with the premeditated violation of the ceasefire and the gratuitous murder of over a 1,100 people, most of them civilians and including babies, young children, women, and the elderly. The outrages of October 7, carried out on the orders of the ancient foes of the Arabs-the Iranians, to disrupt negotiations for a durable peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia, were designed to provoke the war that has occurred and has counted on the useful idiocy or sinister hypocrisy and racism of these interlopers and hooligans at universities and elsewhere to generate such pressures on Israel that it does not exterminate Hamas as a terrorist force. Since Hamas has

signalled again that it will never accept the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, the only possible road to peace and a solution includes the achievement of Israel's war aims. The area of what became the British Mandate for Palestine after the First World War has always been shared by Jews and non-Jews ante-dating the arrival of the Arabs and the birth of Islam. A division of the territory between the Jews and non-Jews has always been the only practical solution and has been on offer by Israel for over 25 years.

There can be no peace while one side does not accept the right to exist of the other side and while a power outside the immediate region, Iran, arms Israel's mortal enemies with huge quantities of rockets on both its northern and southern borders. Since the only way to achieve an agreement is to facilitate the replacement of those who will not negotiate in good faith with the Jewish state of Israel with people who will, Israel has been given one of the most monstrous provocations to war in modern history. It easily exceeds the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which was at least confined to military targets. Though distasteful, the solution is obvious: Israel must pursue the war forced upon it to victory, await the replacement of irresponsible terrorists by constructive Arab statesmen, and negotiate revised borders. Israel and its friends should pay no attention whatever to this duncical infestation of sophomoric puppets envenomed by thugs and terrorist sympathizers. All universities and communities must tolerate peaceful protest within reason, but no university or municipality should yield at all to this ruffraff. Meric Gertler has earned the homage of the whole country.

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