

**Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies**  
**Update on the Situation on Canadian University Campuses**

A brief snapshot highlighting the current situation for Jewish and pro-Israel students on Canadian university campuses clearly shows the most egregious examples of antisemitism are in Ontario and Quebec. In fact, the most shocking case of antisemitic hate on a Canadian campus today is at McGill University, which was labeled the fourth worst post-secondary institution for Jewish students in North America by the *Algemeiner* newspaper in December 2016.

McGill seems intent on living up to this depiction, with an outrageous sequence of events stemming from the decision by the student-run McGill Daily's editors to censor Jewish and pro-Israel students by refusing to publish pro-Israel viewpoints in the paper. A complaint was lodged with the Student Society of McGill University (SSMU) in response to this decision, but the SSMU came down on the side of antisemitic hate, and went so far as to support a student leader who advocated violence against Jews when he advised his Twitter followers to "punch a Zionist" earlier this month. Although he has since deleted the remark and apologized for "publishing a tweet expressing a personal political viewpoint," the student has refused to resign his leadership position and the SSMU has defended him, while targeting a Jewish student who called him out for inciting hatred.

Following this promotion of antisemitic violence, and in reaction to the administration's tepid response, FSWC wrote to the Principal of McGill and sent 750 signed petitions calling on the university to take charge of this dangerous situation, to dissolve the antisemitic SSMU, to offer support for Jewish students who are victimized on campus, and to launch an immediate investigation into the culture of ingrained anti-Jewish hatred at McGill. To date the only concrete action appears to be taken by the Arts Undergraduate Society of McGill, which will vote tomorrow on whether or not to impeach the student.

The consequences to these events are that Jewish students feel increasingly targeted at McGill. A first year student says the Floor Fellows in his residence supported the violent 'punch a Zionist' post, and he believes the people employed to look after student welfare are blatantly biased against Israel and will not facilitate conversation. Events such as an 'Israel Apartheid 101' program at Frosh Week, an Independent Jewish Voices lecture and the disruption of pro-Israel events like Chabad's "Artists 4 Israel" installation in November, capped off by this recent incident, have contributed to Jewish and pro-Israel students feeling insecure at school. He says one student reports she is leaving McGill because she feels unsafe due to lack of university support.

Although a police complaint regarding the 'punch a Zionist' tweet has been filed, it is unclear how this situation will be resolved and what, if any action the university administration will pursue.

In contrast, while institutions in western Canada certainly have their share of anti-Israel activists, their influence does not seem to be quite as significant or damaging. A scan of university newspapers paints a picture of low level efforts in western universities to push the anti-Israel narrative. The most extreme incident occurred in January 2017 when a small private school, the Island School of Business Arts (ISBA) in British Columbia, decided to ban students from Israel over its disagreement with Israeli politics. Following a call from FSWC and a flood of outrage and bad press, the school quickly admitted it made a mistake and rescinded the discriminatory policy.

At the University of British Columbia a Palestinian student group is trying to get a BDS referendum question put to council at the 2017 student union elections; a previous BDS motion in 2015 failed to pass. At the University of Alberta a visiting Political Science professor and Palestinian author presented her anti-Israel, pro-BDS book in January. Interestingly, an article in the University of Calgary's *The Gauntlet* newspaper argues the benefits of the university adding Israel to the list of 25 countries to which students can apply for an international study scholarship - Israel is not currently on this list.

Likewise, at the University of Manitoba, a change to the student union's governing documents includes the removal of a boycott list – the contents of which are unknown as the list was lost years ago. At the other end of the country, the only tangentially relevant items concern Newfoundland's Memorial University's film series exploring the Middle East, and an article about the new Chair of Jewish Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax. It seems safe to say that while there may be individual incidents or simmering activism in both eastern and western Canada, any such activities are not polarizing enough to be captured by local, national or campus media.

The situation in several Ontario universities and at Montreal's two English language campuses is far different. Based on reports from student representatives and newspaper scans, universities including Guelph, Trent, Queens and Waterloo experience very little antisemitic or anti-Israel activity. Conditions at Kings College – Western University are somewhat more difficult, as debate over a potential BDS referendum and controversy about an Appeal Board decision over a possible referendum are ongoing.

In Ontario the real problem lies at the three Toronto campuses. The most controversial issue continues to be at Ryerson, where it was recently revealed that a student walkout during a motion to recognize Holocaust education at a November student union meeting was orchestrated by the student union president. The walkout prevented a vote on the Holocaust motion by denying the necessary quorum. At the time the student union president called the incident 'disturbing'. Now that screenshots of text message conversations between student leaders have been shared, the antisemitism at the heart of the walk-out is clear. As one Jewish student noted in the Ryerson newspaper, "In any other minority group, this would be considered a hate crime."

At York University the public confrontations and drama seems to have lessened but, according to reports from several students, much of the antisemitism has become more systemic. Additionally, this month a "Drop Fees Not Bombs" event was held in support of arms divestment; many felt this event was a smokescreen for Israel boycotts. In the fall a lab technologist was fired for spreading antisemitism on social media, the anti-Israel justice critic for the Green Party spoke to students about his support for BDS and the Justice Center for Constitutional Freedoms gave York an 'A' for free speech for keeping the anti-Israel mural up.

While the University of Toronto campus seems relatively quiet, antisemitism also manifests in systemic ways. One student shared an uncomfortable incident that occurred at a U of T multi-faith dinner on January 18 when one of the keynote speakers - known for strong anti-Israel views, used the podium to launch a disturbing attack on Israel. The Jewish students were stunned, and felt very uncomfortable and alienated; their concerns were as follows: **1.**A known anti-Israel activist was invited to be a keynote speaker **2.**The speaker was not asked to sit down when it became apparent the keynote address was not in keeping with the program **3.** No apology was offered to the students, and: **4.**No follow-up or debrief was taken to address the incident. An email apology from a Jewish intern with the Multi-faith Center was sent to several people about two weeks after the event.

While the situation at McGill has been covered, anti-Israel feelings and support for divestment also continues at Montreal's Concordia University; the Student Union divested \$5.3 million from companies that are associated with Israel in October. As with most universities, the many letters in the student newspaper in support of the Muslim community following the mosque shootings address hate against many groups, but most tend not to include Jews in the list of targeted minorities. Interestingly, while the issue of a professor who allegedly made racist remarks in the classroom in October was widely covered by the Concordia's student newspaper, the paper did not appear to report on a Jewish student threatened by an Arab student for wearing a kippa.