

Barbara Kay: At Ryerson, a rare win for Jewish groups on campus (and one with a pleasant twist)

Tuesday April 4th, 2017



Darren Calabrese/ National Post

A building on Ryerson University's campus is seen in downtown Toronto Monday, June 18, 2012.

Last November, at Ryerson University, Students for Justice in Palestine and the Muslim Students Association led a walkout of Ryerson Student Union's (RSU) Semi-annual General Meeting in order to suspend quorum, when the group Students Supporting Israel (SSI) brought forward a motion endorsing Holocaust Education Week. Without quorum, the motion was unable to pass.

It was later discovered that the RSU executive was complicit in the walkout. The rationale offered by the obstructionists was their preference for a motion to endorse a week in which all genocides would be commemorated. But, as a member of SSI told me, an inference reinforced by other witnesses, "anti-Semitism was present in the room."

Although the original motion was passed at another meeting a month later, the widely-publicized debacle left a bitter aftertaste. If even the Holocaust, which has nothing to do with Zionism or Israeli politics, was considered too contentious a subject for automatic RSU approval, it seemed to confirm the belief among many Jewish students (and Jewish donors, some of whom expressed anger to the administration) that while the condemnation of "oppression" of other minorities on campus as they themselves define it was scrupulously supported, Jewish-specific victimhood was open to often-arbitrary interpretation.

SSI, with the moral support and human resources of Stand With Us, an international organization that fights anti-Israel bias on campus, was determined such unjust marginalization would not happen again. What was needed, they decided, was passage of a new motion entrenching a solid definition of anti-Semitism. New, because an older version of what constitutes anti-Semitism had already been submitted in November, 2014. It had passed, but in a radically amended form to exclude any reference to the state of Israel, and to the demonization of Israel as a form of anti-Semitism, an excision which was unacceptable to SSI.

The SSI have made good on their promise. On March 29 the RSU adopted a new and comprehensive definition of anti-Semitism, which will guard against any repetition of RSU's November humiliation.

Related

- [U of T, McGill University rank in top five of North America's 'worst' schools for Jewish students](#)
- [Mario Silva: Persistence of anti-Semitism shows world has yet to learn lessons of the Holocaust](#)

The new version mirrors the Ottawa Protocol on Combating Anti-Semitism, which is lengthy and detailed. It includes, for example, the stipulation that anti-Semitism is "demonizing/ stereotypical allegations about Jewish people," meaning in part conspiracy theories about world domination of the media or monetary networks by Jews, or "accusing Jews collectively of a wrong committed by a single Jewish person or group," and of course Holocaust denial. As for Israel, the Protocol states that anti-Semitism manifests itself in "denying Jewish people the right to self-determination, applying double standards of behaviour not demanded of any other country, and using anti-Semitic imagery to characterize Israel/ Israelis."

(Sidebar: Readers aware of my vigorous resistance to the recently passed parliamentary Motion 103 may find my approval of the Ottawa Protocols on Anti-Semitism hypocritical. To explain: The Ottawa Protocol, in which every word was weighed and assessed with a view to our right to freedom of speech, defines what our government agrees anti-Semitism is, and also what it is not. What it is is expressed hatred for Jewish people. It is not criticism of Judaism's tenets. Significantly, the Protocol states that "legitimate criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country is not regarded as anti-Semitic." Conversely, M-103, which devolves around the word "Islamophobia" was passed with no definition of Islamophobia attached. Furthermore, it was the concerted, deliberate strategy of all politicians involved to deflect or ignore any questions regarding its putative definition. Those resisting M-103 wanted reassurance that the government was not endorsing a chill on criticism of Islam and its tenets, or of Islamism. None, ominously, was offered.)

The new motion had the enthusiastic co-operation of RSU president, Obaid Ullah. Ullah was accused of complicity in the quorum-closure affair, and is a supporter of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, so it was a pleasant surprise when both SSI president Rebecca Katzman and vice-president Tamar Lyons informed me that Ullah has been a positive partner in entrenching the new definition of anti-Semitism. I then spoke with Ullah, who told me "anti-Semitism exists (on campus) and the Jewish community has not been supported and I think this is a first step (to rectify that)." Of the SSI activists, he said, "These are amazing people ... I want to thank (SSI) for taking the initiative to make this happen despite all the hardships we faced this year."

Good stuff, RSU. I hope other campus student unions will take note of, and aspire to model, the maturity of the relationship formed by these RSU students – opposed in convictions, but joined in pursuit of the larger goal of identity equity.

National Post

kaybarb@gmail.com

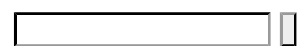
[Twitter.com/ BarbaraRKay](https://twitter.com/BarbaraRKay)

[\(-- image--\) Find National Post on Facebook](#)

- [Twitter](#)
- [Google +](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Email](#)
- [Typo?](#)
- [More](#)

- [Comments](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Digg](#)
- [FarkIt](#)
- [StumbleUpon](#)

Topics: [Full Comment](#), [Full Comment](#), [Ryerson University](#)



Full Comment Videos

Post Picks

['Honey, this might be the one!' Rolling the dice on a 16- year- old Porsche Boxster S](#)

[\(-- image--\)](#)

Peter Bleakney: The flat- six engine sung its siren song and I began to wonder whether I'd already reached peak- Boxster. Then the 'check engine' light came on

[Prince Charles is sad and sexy and may be too nice to be king, according to a newly released biography](#)

[\(-- image--\)](#)

Britain's heir- in- waiting for 65 years, the Prince of Wales has a sign in his dressing room at his country home, Highgrove: 'Be patient and endure'

[An old Italian barn is modernized into a weekend getaway](#)

[\(-- image--\)](#)

Have you ever dreamed of converting an old building into a weekend retreat? Check out what one Milanese family did in Levanto, Italy

[Alec Baldwin says that time he called his daughter a 'rude, thoughtless, little pig' has 'hurt her in a permanent way'](#)

[\(-- image--\)](#)

The now infamous voicemail surfaced in court in 2007 during Baldwin's custody battle with former wife Kim Basinger

[I'm the real wizard': Why Ian McKellen turned down the role of Dumbledore in the Harry Potter movies](#)

(-- image--)

Richard Harris, who played the beloved character in the first two Harry Potter movies, died in 2002. McKellen was then approached to take over the beard

[Recent Tweets](#)

- Barbara Kay: At Ryerson, a rare win for Jewish groups on campus (and one with a pleasant twist) [ow.ly/Iy2j50aDoaY 44 minutes ago](#)
- Chris Selley: The NHL can do better than the Olympics — but it probably won't [ow.ly/lS250aDoaZ 44 minutes ago](#)
- John Robson: Yes, our options on North Korea aren't great. But decapitating the regime certainly holds some app... [ow.ly/2MoU50aDoaX 44 minutes ago](#)
- Kelly McParland: Ontario Liberals get hit by their own hydro blame boomerang [ow.ly/25Oq50aDjkP 1 hour ago](#)
- Andrew Coyne: Bombardier executives nabbed \$3.7B in subsidies, yet the mob demands we punish them? [ow.ly/8mgc50aCu7Z 16 hours ago](#)

[\(-- image--\) FP Comment](#)

- [Terence Corcoran: Ignore the bad politics and sensationalism. Bombardier's execs deserve what they are owed](#)
- [Letter: Pickering is a boon to Ontario, says Ontario Power Generation CEO](#)
- [Jack Mintz: Trump's NAFTA tweaks means Canada needs to carefully plan a negotiation strategy](#)

Our Partners

- [Infomart](#)
- [The Province](#)
- [Vancouver Sun](#)
- [Edmonton Journal](#)
- [Calgary Herald](#)
- [Regina Leader- Post](#)
- [Saskatoon StarPhoenix](#)
- [Windsor Star](#)
- [Ottawa Citizen](#)
- [Montreal Gazette](#)

Classifieds

- [Remembering](#)
- [Celebrating](#)
- [Classifieds Marketplace](#)
- [Workopolis](#)
- [FlyerCity](#)
- [Classifieds Self- Service](#)

Services

- [Advertise with us](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Subscriber Services](#)
- [ePaper](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Site map](#)

Legal

- [Privacy](#)
- [Terms](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Copyright & permissions](#)

Connect with Us

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Pinterest](#)

© 2017 National Post, a division of Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by [WordPress.com VIP](#)

(-- image--)
(-- image--)(-- image--)(-- image--)