

# Opinion: The anti-Israel boycott movement has no place on university campuses



HARVEY LEVINE, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE

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McGill University is seen during a snowfall in Montreal on Friday, January 4, 2013. ALLEN MCINNIS / MONTREAL GAZETTE  
FILE PHOTO

Over the past two years, undergraduate students at McGill University twice defeated a boycott and sanctions motion against Israel at their annual assembly. The motion should have been laid to rest, but the anti-Israel boycott movement refuses to respect the democratic process and a third motion will be voted on by the Student Society of McGill University on Monday, Feb. 22.

B'nai Brith has long been on the record criticizing the boycott and sanctions movement because it places all blame on Israel. The movement makes no mention of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, which are responsible for the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Jews and Palestinians after the establishment of the state of Israel, or the fact that the Palestinian leadership conducts an ongoing campaign indoctrinating hatred against the Jewish people

throughout its schools and media. That leadership has stated that it will never again negotiate directly with Israel.

Anti-Israel boycott activists have no interest in actively helping Palestinian Arabs, or they would be focusing on actionable ways to improve conditions, such as combatting corruption in the Palestinian Authority and calling for an end to Hamas's summary executions in the streets of Gaza. Conditions for Palestinian Arabs working for Israeli companies are actually worsened by boycotting the Israeli goods they manufacture.

On campus, the boycott and sanctions movement has become the de facto cause of Canada's post-secondary institutions, bullying students with its propaganda. Many students have reported to us that they fear that speaking out or questioning professors associated with the anti-Israel movement will have a negative effect on their academic careers.

These tactics are especially reprehensible because they silence students and prevent them from critically examining the movement's propaganda. They also distract students from exploring human-rights injustices perpetrated by countries such as Iran or Syria and even the Palestinian Authority itself. A recent Brandeis University study reports that Canadian universities are over-represented among campuses with the highest levels of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hostility.

McGill students on the B'nai Brith Young Leadership Committee say they feel there are few safe places at McGill where they can fairly debate or express their opinions in writing or on social media. None wanted to be quoted by name in this space, fearing repercussions. They say being part of a pro-Israel group results in their being targeted with racist remarks and blatant anti-semitism under the guise of the boycott movement.

False assertions that Jews have no ancient connection to the land of Israel, the demand that Israeli Jews give up their right to political self-determination, and demonization of Israel as the world's worst human-rights violator are usually followed by the standard line: "Don't worry. I don't hate Jews, just Zionists."

These tropes are only part of the ongoing effort of the boycott movement to isolate and "other" the Jewish state and by extension the Jewish people.

B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights has tracked antisemitism in Canada for more than 30 years. The data clearly show that the growth of anti-Israel activity translates to the growth of anti-semitism. In a tolerant and pluralistic Canadian society, there is no room for a small minority to impose its hateful views on entire institutions, no matter how vocal it may be.

That university campuses, where the mutual exchange of ideas is necessary for the very functioning of the institution, have been chosen as venues for boycotts and the prevention of free and open dialogue about human rights exposes the reality behind the movement.

It is anti-Semitic, and it is activist thugism. It must stop. The time is long past to show what it really is, namely part of a global propaganda campaign demonizing Israel and aiming at her de-legitimization.

Harvey Levine is executive director of the Quebec region of B'nai Brith Canada.