

The purpose of this letter is to alert York University and specifically the Political Science Faculty to my concerns regarding the content and method of delivery of the course titled “War and Peace in the Middle East” (APOLS3260) directed by Prof. Saeed Rehnema. Having completed this course with distinction (A) as a regular undergraduate student, I believe that I have the right if not the obligation but definitely the credibility to request that the course, its material and its method of delivery be examined and upgraded if it were to be included in future curricula. By way of introduction and in order to avoid any confusion, I am an Israeli born expatriate now living in Canada for forty years. While I would consider myself a moderate and a firm believer in the “Two State Solution” to the Israeli Palestinian conflict I am also entirely uncompromising with regards to the legitimacy of the State of Israel and its right to exist as a Jewish State within redrawn but secure borders.

It is important to get my politics out of the way in order to understand my assertion that the course in question is designed so as to bring into question that very legitimacy. This is achieved both directly and indirectly through a combination of one-sided selective reading material, the Professor’s personal opinions and public domain articles (note 1). However my complaint goes much further than that in asserting and substantiating through documented case studies that the Professor is utilizing a publically funded institution platform to influence rather than to educate the (mostly pre-disposed) students. This is accomplished through such tactics as blatant distortions by commission, or by selective omission of undisputed historical facts as illustrated below through carefully documented examples.

Right from the first lecture Prof. Rehnema tackled the Israeli Palestinian conflict head on to set the tone for the entire course. Utilizing “game theory” the Professor drew a “flowchart” on the board that through cleverly constructed Yes/No questions and within minutes arrived at the “inevitable” conclusion as to the only logical solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict: “Israel must abandon its insistence on remaining a Jewish state”. The truth according to Prof. Rehnema is that there can only be one state in Palestine on the assumption that no side will compromise on its core issues and therefore demographics will dictate that it is destined to become a Muslim majority ruled “democracy”. This outcome is guaranteed to occur in less than 100 years due strictly to demographics. Therefore if there were to be an end to the conflict any time earlier it could only happen if Israel abandons its insistence on remaining a Jewish state. The student body was generally delighted with the speed and simplicity of the argument and its conclusion.

Upon review of the reading material included in the course kit it is absent of even one article that does not portray Palestinians as innocent victims of American – Israeli (Zionist) imperialism. Amongst other are included articles that place direct blame on Israel for the failure of the Camp David summit contrary to many who attended the Summit like Bill Clinton, Dennis Ross and others (note 2), assert that the Zionist movement collaborated with the Nazis (note 3), and challenging the use of the term Shoa or Holocaust and comparing it to the Naqba (note 4).

The distinguished scholars who wrote these articles are fully entitled to their opinion and their works must be recognized and respected. However by not including any article with a different or at the very least a more balanced point of view (of which there exist at least as many) the Professor manipulates, in my opinion, the student’s ability to learn historical facts and establish

their own learned point of view. This practice may be acceptable at Al Jazeera University but not at the tax payer subsidized York University with all due respect to its Marxist reputation.

During a lecture dedicated to Israel the Professor specifically urged the students to dismiss the “myth” that in its War of Independence in 1948 (referred to by the Professor as hostilities between Jews and Palestinians) Israel fought organized Arab Armies in a David and Goliath scenario. In fact the “truthiness” (a term aimed to describe what you would like other people to believe is the truth) was that The Haganna was a British trained and well organized army fighting the Palestinians “farmers”. That the Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi armies did not really engage with the Israelis (e.g. The Golda Meir – King Abdulla “deal”) and furthermore were disorganized as said Arab countries just emerged from under Colonialism. Therefore the outcome was that Israel grabbed more land than was allocated to it in the UN Partition Plan.

I was born in Israel. I lived during the 1948 War. I ran to the shelters when Egyptian aircrafts bombed Israel, my father fought against the Jordanian Legion that encircled Jerusalem. The Professor’s junk history is at best distorted and at worst revisionary. Note 5 features a table illustrating the alignment of forces at the beginning of the 1948 war that clearly shows the superiority of the Arab armies in terms of deployed military hardware if not manpower. The Arab armies did fight the Israelis directly and fiercely. This is a historical fact because I saw it with my own eyes as did my father. Second year students may buy this distortion as for them it is ancient history and who better than the Professor knows the historical facts. Not me. My intention in registering to this course was to learn historical facts about the Middle East not to be subjected to anti-Zionist propaganda.

In a lecture dedicated to Palestine the Professor described the emergence of the PLO and the Hamas. He was quick to note (a fact) that the Israelis originally supported the Hamas when it was a charity organization. But he was quick to point out that the “ignorant” Israelis were not aware of what was coming. The student body responded with a healthy chuckle. In describing the PLO’s and Hamas’ military activities against Israel including the first and second Intifadas there was no mention of the many suicide bombing that killed hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians, men, women and children in buses, restaurants, pubs and while celebrating the Jewish holiday of Passover.

The 1972 Munich Massacre was described as part of Black September’s desire to attract international attention by taking Israeli athletes hostages. An incident that ended in a shoot-out between the Israeli Mossad together with the German Security Forces and the hostage takers during which 11 Israeli athletes were killed. This is not what happened. 2 Israelis were killed at point blank before the rest were taken hostage. The Mossad or any other Israeli security force was denied access to the theater and was not allowed to engage with the Terrorists (not a term used by the Professor). These are the facts.

In a lecture dedicated to Palestine, the Professor described in great detail the expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians from their land (certainly true but not all were expelled as many followed the advice of the Arab nations to evacuate so as to not be caught in the cross fire with a promise to be repatriated as soon as Israel were to be defeated) while Israel continued to absorb wave after wave of immigration and expand its “land grab” strategy. He failed however to mention in

the lecture dedicated to Israel that the wave of immigration post 1948 was largely caused by the expulsion of some 800,000 to a million Jews from their homes in Arab countries due to persecution, anti-Semitism and political instability. Many Iranian and Kurdish Jews abandoned their property behind too, in fear to remain hostages of hostile regimes (note 6) .

In a private meeting with the Professor summoned at his request he complained on behalf of the student body about my constant questioning if not challenging inquiries during the lectures. I was told that: “you know only one side of the story”. No. More than any other student in the class except perhaps Peter Murphy (ex CTV reporter who is either an observer or a teacher assistant but definitely not a registered student, who reinforces the Professor’s presentation by offering original source material that is not included in any of the course material (e.g. Amnesty International Report) and urges student to read it.) Sorry, I know both sides of the story. In fact I registered to this course to enhance my knowledge of both sides of the story. The course is now completed I am yet to hear the “other side of the story”.

In conclusion I request that the proper authorities at York University investigate my grievance and respond to my request to scrutinize this course and upgrade it to include a more balanced structure and content if it is to be included in future curricula. I offer my full co-operation in any such investigation and will openly share my notes and recorded information in the event that the few examples offered in this letter would not suffice.