# Robert Lantos: A false narrative about Israel has hijacked progressive minds. We must call people out for their selective social conscience

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*The following is a speech by film producer Robert Lantos, the Chair of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Spirit of Hope Benefit Gala, delivered at the May 18th event in Toronto.*

Simon Wiesenthal was a man of action. Not content to let complacent governments deal with the butchers of the Holocaust, he hunted them and forced them to face justice. In so doing, he announced to the world that from now on, there is a high price to pay for harming Jews.

With his help, the Mossad captured the mass murderer Adolf Eichmann in Argentina. I was then attending school in neighbouring Uruguay, where Israel’s covert operation caused massive outrage. It was a tense time to be the only Jew in my school. But I felt proud. For the first time in two thousand years, the world understood that if you mess with us, there are consequences. That Jews can — and will — deal with those who intend to harm them. That Jews are no longer at the mercy of their tormentors. That Jews fight back.

I was born in Hungary, where Jew hatred has a long and blood-drenched history. A country whose Jews took comfort in being the most assimilated in Europe. They were convinced that their social status and achievements made them untouchable. Yet, the majority of the Jewish population was massacred in a matter of weeks.

We must learn from the lessons of history, so that our children and their children never face the horrors that my parents witnessed. Today, Jews face two wars. The permanent armed struggle in defence of Israel, a battle that Israel can never afford to lose. And the war of words, throughout the diaspora — and right here in Canada.

Words matter. They are powerful weapons. Words can legitimize the criminal and vilify the just. Words can provide the fuel for hate and the alibi for persecution and violence. Libelous fabrications, like “Israel Apartheid” and “Zionist aggression,” are the pretext for the BDS movement, whose stated objective is the destruction of the Jewish State. Their false narrative has hijacked progressive hearts and minds and become gospel in politically correct circles. It feeds the new wave of Jew hatred sweeping across Europe, where, in many countries, synagogues and Jewish institutions can now only function under military protection. The false narrative thrives on our own campuses, where we must expose its lies and confront it with the most powerful weapon at our disposal, namely, the truth. Because as we know, and as Barbara Kay has written, “what ends in law, often begins in academia.”

Since its inception, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted 135 country-specific resolutions. Of those, 68 condemn Israel. The following is a list of some of the enlightened democracies that are current or past members of the UN Human Rights Commission: Sudan, Congo, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, China, Russia. It is with these champions of human rights that today’s left aligns itself: authoritarian regimes, which persecute the LGBTQ community, are intolerant of women’s rights, of freedom of the press and of freedom of expression.

The so-called progressives who denounce Israel are unfazed by the jailing of dissenters in Iran, oblivious to the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia, blind to the incarceration and torture of gay men in Qatar, accepting of widespread female genital mutilation and unperturbed by the persecution of Christians in several Islamic countries. Their single fixation is on the Jewish state, a country whose laws treat all citizens equally, regardless of gender or religion and guarantee them education, healthcare and civil liberties. A country where freedom of expression is sacred.

It is time to stop kidding ourselves and to call all those with such selective social conscience the anti-Semites we all know they are. Hitler and the Nazis were vanquished but Jew hatred was not. It has found renewed vigour in an unholy partnership between the jihadists and the proverbial useful idiots, who hide under the progressive mantle.

In a sermon in Montreal, at the Al-Andalous Islamic Center, Imam Sayed al-Ghitawi included the following supplications:

“Oh Allah, destroy the cursed Jews.”
“Oh Allah, show us the black day you inflict on them.”
“Oh Allah, make their children orphans and their women widows.”

This sermon was delivered in 2014, but it was not until it recently surfaced online, that the Al-Andalous Islamic Center distanced itself from it. I do not propose to paint all Muslims with this imam’s brush. I assume he does not speak for mainstream Islam. My point is that there has been no outcry in the halls of power in Ottawa. The story barely made the news. Parliament is not about to introduce a law criminalizing Jew hatred.

Which brings us to our campuses, where Jewish students are harassed and intimidated if they state pro-Israeli views. At McGill, my alma mater, the Daily, on whose editorial board I once served, now refuses to publish any opinion piece that “promote a Zionist worldview.” Three months ago, Igor Sadikov, a member of the Student Society of McGill University’s legislative council, urged one and all to “punch a Zionist today.” He subsequently resigned from the council, but he remains a McGill student in good standing.

On the other hand, shortly thereafter, Andrew Potter, the former director of McGill’s Institute for the Study of Canada, was unceremoniously dumped from this position for writing a critical piece about Quebec society. The same administration that took instant and drastic action against a director for voicing peaceful social criticism is content to allow someone who incites violence against Jews to roam on its campus. These back-to-back events crystallize the new double standard in academia: zero tolerance for any offence, however slight, whether perceived or real, against any community or any people — except for the Jews.

Many on the left have come to believe that in order to burnish their progressive credentials, they must distance themselves from Israel. The real travesty is that they link arms with those who enslave women, those who torture and jail dissenters, those who censor freedom of expression, those who persecute members of other religions and those who incite the genocide of the Jewish state.

The most important lesson of the Holocaust is that it must never again happen. That if your enemies threaten to kill you, you should take them seriously. Simon Wiesenthal understood this lesson and acted upon it.