



## **Submission to the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism** **Queen's Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life**

*Founded in 1942, Queen's Hillel is the oldest Jewish Students Association in Canada. Today, Queen's Hillel strives to be a centre for Jewish campus life at Queen's. With a membership of roughly 200 students, and an executive of 30 students, Queen's Hillel plans social, religious, cultural, and educational events throughout the year. As well, Hillel strives to be a prominent Jewish voice at Queen's, to work with the administration and student government, to enhance ties with the Kingston Jewish community, to combat antisemitism, and to carry out the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam – healing the world – through social action projects.*

*Queen's Hillel is member of the Canadian Federation of Jewish Students.*

*This report was compiled by Josh Zelikovitz, Immediate Past-President of Queen's Hillel, in consultation with the Hillel Executive, Queen's students, alumni, and members of the Kingston Jewish Community.*

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Queen's University has historically been in the forefront of providing access to Jewish students. In the 1940s, when many Canadian universities had strict quotas on the number of Jews permitted to enroll, Queen's was one of the few institutions to open its doors to Jewish students. Today, Jewish students do not appear to face overt day-to-day antisemitism at Queen's. For the most part, Jews are treated equally and fairly; accommodation is given to Jewish students for certain special needs (such as missing exams for holidays), and Jews are well represented among faculty, administration, and student elected officials. However, there have been isolated incidents of antisemitism at Queen's that Hillel wishes to address. This report will catalogue recent incidents and trends of antisemitism at Queen's University.

Firstly, this report will address antisemitism in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Queen's Hillel firmly believes that criticism of Israel is not antisemitic, over the past several years we have witnessed that demonization of the Jewish state can often be used as a vehicle for antisemitism. For example, on several instances, anti-Israel stances have been used to promote classically antisemitic motifs such as blood libel, portrayal of Jews in stereotypically derogatory ways (large noses, money bags, et cetera), comparison of Jews or Jewish Israelis to Nazis, or alleging Jewish conspiracies to control the world.

In several cases, antisemitism at Queen's has been connected to anti-Israel cartoons that have used classically antisemitic imagery. In March of 2004, the Queen's Palestinian Human Rights association distributed literature portraying Jews with big noses and carrying large sacks of money. When Queen's Hillel pursued the issue, the leader of Queen's Palestinian Human Rights association denied that the cartoons were antisemitic, and asserted that his organization could not



be antisemitic on the grounds that (as stated to the Queen's Journal, 04/01/2004) "Palestinians are Semites too." In essence QPHR (now known as SPHR – Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights) denied not only that its literature was antisemitic (which it was), but also categorically denied – based on the etymology of the word *antisemitism* – the possibility that the organization was even capable of committing antisemitism. Of course, QPHR fundamentally misused the term antisemitism. While the term 'Semite' is a now-defunct word for people of Middle Eastern descent, the term 'antisemitism' as first penned by in 1860 by Moritz Steinschneider, refers explicitly and exclusively to hatred against Jews.

In 2008, a similar incident – also involving political cartoons – occurred. SPHR (Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights - nee QPHR) had several cartoons posted on its facebook page demonizing Israel. Two of the cartoons explicitly equated Jews with Nazis, while a third image evoked the blood libel – showing Jews preparing to drink the blood of Palestinians. Ironically, the person who originally posted the pictures to SPHR's facebook page was not only a leader in SPHR, but was also a key leader in QCRED – the Queen's Coalition Against Racial and Ethnic Discrimination – a major antiracist group on campus, with projects that are funded in part by the University. Queen's Hillel met with the student leader who posted the cartoons. Though she denied that they were antisemitic, she eventually removed the images.

Some incidents of antisemitism at Queen's have been directly propagated by faculty. In 2007, Jewish students reported to Hillel that their sociology professor had accused Canadian Jewish organizations (such as the Canadian Jewish Congress) of a conspiracy to manipulate Canadian foreign policy. The professor later apologized. Also in 2007, a political studies professor attempted to portray the Holocaust as an internal Jewish conflict, by stating (falsely) that Hitler was Jewish. A member of Queen's Hillel contacted this professor, but the professor did not retract his statements or apologize. In 2008, a Jewish student dropped her Women's Studies class after feeling she was being targeted by the professor's virulently anti-Israel views. This same professor was involved in the 'checkpoint incident' discussed below. In 2009, a philosophy professor, teaching a required course, when e-mailing his course's syllabus to the class, attached below his signature a number of statements, one of whom equated Israel with Nazi Germany. The professor later claimed that he had included the statements to the e-mail accidentally.

In 2009, Queen's University experienced 'Israel Apartheid Week' (IAW) for the first time. Originally founded at the University of Toronto, IAW is a weeklong event that aims to delegitimize the State of Israel by drawing a comparison between the Arab-Israel conflict, and Apartheid-era South Africa. At Queen's, IAW is organized by SPHR (formerly known as QPHR). At some schools, such as York University, IAW has led to major confrontations with pro-Israel groups, and allegations of harassment of Jewish students. This has not been the case at Queen's. However, there were several troubling situations that emerged at Queen's during IAW.

A major concern during IAW was the issue of mock checkpoints. Prior to IAW, a faculty member in the Department of Film and Media sent an e-mail to other faculty asking them to set up mock checkpoints at the entrances to their classes. These checkpoints consisted of volunteers from IAW/SPHR standing outside classrooms, refusing to let students enter, so as to analogize



the experience of Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank. Checkpoints were followed by a lengthy slide show and discussion in the class, led by IAW/SPHR activists, with the permission of the class instructor. Several professors carried out these exercises, one of which was the same professor who caused a Jewish student to drop her class (as discussed above) earlier in the year. A number of students (Jewish and non-Jewish) in these classes came forward to Hillel expressing concerns, ranging from allegations of abuse of podium to harassment. Hillel viewed the mock checkpoints to be one-sided and an abuse of power, especially when they took place in classes that were wholly unrelated to issues of Israel and Palestine (such as Film Studies and Women's Studies). Given the possibilities for harassment and escalation, Queen's Hillel attempted to work with the University to seek an appropriate recourse that balanced the issues of academic freedom with the potential problems that these one-sided theatrics presented. After meeting with University officials, an e-mail was sent to faculty members by a senior member of the University administration requesting (but not requiring, so as not to violate principles of academic freedom) that no further checkpoints be held. Nonetheless, further checkpoints were carried out. While the checkpoints were unsettling to many Jewish students, and also raised issues of harassment and abuse of podium, Queen's Hillel does not believe that the checkpoints were explicitly antisemitic, and notes that some of the organizers of the checkpoints were themselves, Jews. However, we believe that checkpoints, and similar demonizations clear the path for antisemitism by creating an environment of hatred and fear.

During IAW, a pro-Israel group on campus distributed literature throughout the university. One such pamphlet was a copy of a National Post article in which two black South African women discussed IAW and asserted that Israel could not be compared to an Apartheid regime. During IAW, a Jewish student found that one of these pamphlets (sitting in a public cafeteria) had been defaced with several swastikas. Though Queen's Hillel does not believe that the organizers of IAW were involved in defacing the literature with a swastika, we believe this antisemitic outburst was symptomatic of the toxic environment created by Israel Apartheid Week.

Some instances of antisemitism at Queen's have been directly related to the belittling or soft-denial of the Holocaust. Each year, Queen's Hillel runs Holocaust Education Week, during which, we create and operate a large walk-through display in the JDUC (student centre). Many years, there has been a response wall for people to share their feelings at the end of the display. After the 'response wall' was littered with antisemitic remarks, or remarks denying the Holocaust, Queen's Hillel replaced the response wall with a board for people to pin post-it-notes (which could be removed if they were antisemitic). Eventually, we were forced to remove the response wall entirely because of the overwhelming number of hateful and inappropriate remarks.

A major incident of belittling the Holocaust occurred in March of 2008 after an Israeli incursion into Gaza. SPHR placed a large banner in the JDUC (student centre) commemorating "Victims of the Gaza Shoah." *Shoah* is the Hebrew word for the Holocaust. Queen's Hillel argued that using the word "Shoah" in this context diminished the enormity of the Holocaust and the memory of the 6 million Jews who were murdered by Nazi Germany. This calculated use of a reference to the Holocaust contributed nothing to meaningful discourse, and was insensitive to



the Jewish student population at Queen's. The then-Co-President of Hillel met with the head of SPHR, hoping to difuse the situation, however, SPHR was uncooperative. In response, Queen's Hillel placed a poster next to SPHR's which read: "Shoah: The mass murder of six million European Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Misuse of this word is offensive and hurtful to Jewish people."

Over the past few years, a number of cases of antisemitism have been reported, wholly unrelated to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In November 2008, a Jewish student's vehicle was defaced with several swastikas and the phrase "dirty Jew" was written across the windows. Queen's Hillel and the Kingston Police were both notified immediately. It is worth noting that this event occurred amidst a series of racists incidents at Queen's targeting various different groups, such as a series of attacks against the offices and prayer room of the Queen's University Muslim Students' Association (an organization with which Queen's Hillel enjoys a close relationship, and with which we have co-sponsored numerous events) were vandalized and robbed, Muslim women were verbally harassed, and a black faculty member was forced off the sidewalk and verbally harassed.

In September of 2004, a large swastika (about 1 metre tall, and accompanied by a homophobic caption) was drawn on an official university bulletin board in the west campus gymnasium. Though the gym's staff immediately reported the graffiti, the university left the hate symbol on the wall for over a week. It was only after an investigation by the Queen's Journal (student newspaper) that the university removed the swastika.

Other incidents of antisemitic graffiti have occurred in the Queen's community, most recently in the summer of 2009.

Queen's University is the home to a vibrant and growing Jewish community. The vast majority of Jewish students at Queen's do not face antisemitism on a day-to-day basis. In the past few years, antisemitism at Queen's has taken place in two main forms; firstly, anti-Israel issues which have plunged into antisemitism by using traditional antisemitic themes; and secondly, classic antisemitism, unrelated to issues of the Arab-Israel conflict. The vast majority of incidents have fallen into the first category. While criticism of Israel is legitimate and necessary (as it is of for all democracies), time after time at Queen's, criticism of Israel has been used as a launching point for antisemitism. Antisemitism must be rooted out of our educational institutions in order to promote an equitable, pluralistic, and safe learning environment for all students. Queen's Hillel will continue to push for a campus where Jewish students can thrive, free of harassment, intimidation, and racism.