

TURKISH AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

March 23, 2009

Heather Monroe-Blum
President
McGill University
Room 506, James Administration Building
845 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec
H3A2T5

RE: Freedom of Speech and Genocide Accusations

Dear Madame President:

We were prompted to write this letter by the announcement of the McGill University Armenian Students' Association (ASA) that it would file an equity complaint against the campus' Turkish Students' Society. ASA's apparent grievance is with TSSMU's audacity in inviting to speak at McGill a Turkish university professor and author, Türkkaya Ataöv, who disputes that the Ottoman Armenian deaths during World War I satisfy the strict criteria for the crime of genocide. The head of ASA sought prior to the event to censor Ataöv's appearance. As the Pope had his Index of Forbidden Books, so the ASA would have its Index of Forbidden Persons.

Ataöv would be joined by a substantial roster of other scholars or historians if ASA's censorship were to succeed. Others who dispute the Armenian genocide include, but are not limited to, famed Middle East expert Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, Canadian historian Gwynne Dyer, the late Stanford Shaw of U.C.L.A., Justin McCarthy of the University of Louisville, Guenter Lewy of the University of Massachusetts, Brian G. Williams of the University of Massachusetts, David Fromkin of Boston University, Avigdor Levy of Brandeis University, Michael M. Gunter of Tennessee Tech, Pierre Oberling of Hunter College, the late Roderic Davison of George Washington University, Michael Radu of Foreign Policy Research Institute, and military historian Edward J. Erickson. In Europe yet more scholars have endorsed a contra-genocide analysis of the history of the Ottoman Armenians, among them Gilles Veinstein of the College de France, Augusto Sinagra of the University of Roma-Sapienza, Norman Stone of Bilkent University, and the historian Andrew Mango of the University of London. The United Nations, as well as the British and Swedish governments have specifically repudiated in recent

years Armenian initiatives to elicit endorsements of their genocide views despite intense lobbying.

A March 4 article by The McGill Tribune's Editor-in-Chief, Matt Chesser maligned Professor Ataöv, as a "Genocide denier," in his eye-catching title. The same day, the paper editorialized in, "Freedom and genocide," about the virtues of, "defending scoundrels." Disparaging Ataöv as touting "implausible theories," the editorial concluded, "But the Armenian Genocide happened, and nothing Ataöv, or anyone else, says can change that. That's an easy debate to win, so there's no need to stifle it—especially at the expense of free speech on campus." Ricky Kreitner of the McGill Daily echoed in a March 16 editorial that Ataöv was a buffoon, but that ASA's attempted suppression of free speech was misplaced

We agree that the genuine historic controversy deserves more debate. We believe that many Armenians who seek to stifle discussion are frightened by the prospect of losing before an independent and impartial audience.

In contrast to the Holocaust, no court has ever adjudicated the Armenian genocide accusation. Armenian Americans oppose taking the question to the International Court of Justice, the sole neutral arbiter entrusted with jurisdiction to hear accusations of state-sponsored genocide according to Article IX of the United Nations Genocide Convention. They oppose taking the question to an impartial and neutral commission of experts, as Turkey's Prime Minister has proposed to Armenia's President.

In the not too distant past, without a whisper of protest from the Armenian community, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia and the Justice Commandos for the Armenian Genocide were listed as terrorist organizations for killing, maiming, or threatening proponents of contra-genocide viewpoints. The late Professor Stanford Shaw's house was fire bombed and his car booby-trapped because he unflinchingly defended his right to academic freedom. Allow us to highlight incidents in your area: On April 8, 1982, the Turkish Embassy's Commercial Counselor to Canada, Kani Güngör was paralyzed from a shooting during an attack by Armenian terrorists at his Ottawa, Ontario apartment. On August 23, 1982, the Turkish military attaché to Canada, Col. Atilla Altıkat, was assassinated by Armenian terrorists in Ottawa while sitting in his vehicle at a traffic light. And on March 12, 1985, an Armenian group seized the Turkish embassy, killing a Canadian security guard in the process.

ASA's fierce language aiming to censor contra-genocide viewpoints and seeking sanctions against persons desiring to listen to the "forbidden" speech are first cousin to earlier chronic Armenian violence against Turkey. It has largely succeeded in frightening Turkish Canadians against disputing the Armenian genocide narrative.

We applaud Deputy Provost Morton Mendelson's refusal to censor Professor Ataöv. We share the university's idiom that the remedy for ill-informed or ill-advised speech is more speech, not enforced silence. Thus, we would encourage McGill to sponsor a debate or seminar between proponents and opponents of the Armenian genocide accusation. Students can decide for themselves which side seems most persuasive. Genocide is too important to be relegated to polemics, ultimatums, or intimidation.

Sincerely,

Bruce Fein

David Saltzman

Attorneys for TALDF