

Canada and the Rights of Palestinians: The CBC and the Crucifixion of Nadia Shoufani, On Behalf of Israeli Interests...

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The Canadian Broadcasting Company is paid for by Canadian taxpayers and is touted as the main institution promoting national cultural unity. The CBC's treatment of a Canadian activist, however, demonstrates its prioritization of Israeli interests.

Speakers of all faiths are featured at the annual Al Quds Day (“Jerusalem”) events, an international commemoration of the Palestinian situation that started in Iran. Nadia Shoufani, of Palestinian descent, was one of the Christian speakers on July 2nd ; speaking on her own behalf, she passionately described* the horrific treatment that Palestinians are facing, noted their legal right to resist the brutal Israeli military occupation, and called on listeners to support Palestinian resistance in any way they were able to, including by breaking the silence on this issue and by boycotting Israeli products. She mentioned two famous men whose lives were destroyed by Israel, the revered cultural icon Ghassan Kanafani, and Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, still imprisoned after 30 years in France because of American pressure — a *cause célèbre*.

Shoufani's address was legitimate: her description of the Palestinian situation was accurate and backed up by official Canadian foreign policy which recognizes the illegality of the Israeli settlements and occupation. Palestinians are asking for the application of the international laws which are supposed to guarantee their basic rights. Shoufani was within her rights calling for the economic pressure that worked in *apartheid* South Africa.

B'nai Brith Canada, one of the groups invested in defending Israel's apartheid and ongoing crimes against humanity, has tried to have Al Quds events banned by the Ontario legislature. Speakers at these events can expect ugly repercussions. The United Church of Canada was pressured into publicly “repudiating” one of its members (who had given a bland talk) because they had been unwittingly introduced as “from the United Church”; someone even complained *personally* to their minister about their appearance at that event.

Shoufani's address was electric, and Israel's defenders sprang into action. They discovered that she was a teacher, where she taught, what she taught, what school board she worked for and private Facebook posts to her family and close friends; they saw that she was vulnerable. They found that at some point, the men she had referenced had been connected to the PFLP, a Palestinian resistance group that Canada put on its “terror list” in 2003. B'nai Brith Canada and the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center lodged complaints to the police and Shoufani's school board alleging that she had publicly supported violence and

terrorism. B'nai Brith then came out with a news release announcing that she was being investigated by the police and the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board.

The news release “came to the attention” of a CBC news producer and reporter, and on July 13th, Murial Draaisma wrote an article that repeated B'nai Brith's accusations against Shoufani. It claimed that Kanafani and Abdallah were linked to the PFLP, and Draaisma gratuitously added two paragraphs describing PFLP terrorism as if that were relevant to Shoufani. She included a B'nai Brith comment that teachers who had such opinions should not be allowed in classrooms.

Draaisma had neglected to contact Shoufani to get her side of the story, and she had also neglected to do any fact-checking. Kanafani, along with his niece, had been murdered (by Israeli agents) in 1972, 30 years before the PFLP was on the “terror list”; Abdallah had not been a PFLP member since 1979, two decades before that designation. The article that linked Nadia Shoufani to the PFLP was libelous.

Many groups and individuals quickly contacted the CBC Ombudsman Esther Enkin and the news producer to correct the CBC's linking of Shoufani to the PFLP. Enkin's response of August 3rd, however, not only rationalized Draaisma's lack of balance but repeated the defamation and claimed that Shoufani's support of the men was a legitimate cause for Canadian concern. A follow-up letter by CBC Toronto Executive Producer Pras Rajagopalan noted that, “... *in an effort to provide better context, we have also undertaken to follow the story closely and report further developments. On Aug. 10 we posted a second story.*”

Despite the correct information that the CBC had received, that article, “*Mississauga teacher suspended following school board probe into appearance at pro-Palestinian rally: Nadia Shoufani appears in video praising 2 men linked to what Canada considers a terror group*” by “CBC News”, reiterates the factually untrue and deceitful statement that [the men] “*are linked to the PFLP*”.

The Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board's public treatment of Nadia Shoufani was unusual; it normally kept investigations private until issues were resolved. Shoufani's suspension from her job by a religious, educational body that should support freedoms of speech and belief — particularly of its employees — is a betrayal that begs the question of their motive. Why are they succumbing to the apparent bullying of the pro-Israel lobby that would endanger the reputation and livelihood of a loyal employee?

- Would they have suspended a non-Arab teacher under these circumstances?
- Would they have publicized it?
- Are they cowed by B'nai Brith's insinuation that only those who support Israel should be allowed to teach?
- *Will they informally vet future teachers' political perspectives?*

While it's to be expected that those who are invested in defending the State of Israel would attack those calling for a resolution based on international law, why are elected officials, community leaders and even faith-based organizations capitulating to bullying that violates the rights of Canadians?

The loyalties of all of those involved in such bullying situations should be challenged. Israel's lobbyists choose to call such challenges to *their* loyalties "anti-Semitic", yet they continue to make demands that damage Canadian interests in order to benefit Israel.

The actions of the CBC are a case in point. After having been notified that its article on Nadia Shoufani was spurious and defamatory, why did the CBC insist on reiterating libel that would humiliate her, destroy her reputation, threaten her livelihood and chill Canadian freedom of speech on this issue? Who benefits from the CBC's actions?

Canadians exercising their rights should not be threatened by Canadians representing the interests of any foreign state. Those who are concerned about the CBC's treatment of Nadia Shoufani should demand of CBC President Hubert Lacroix and The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage, as well as their Members of Parliament, that the CBC stop placing the interests of those invested in Israel over the interests of their own country.

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