

November 15, 2020

CUPE 3906 Executive Committee Opposes the Ford's Anti-Democratic Bill-168, Which Silences Palestinians and Threatens Academic Freedom

The CUPE 3906 executive stands firm against the Ford government's recent adoption of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism \(IHRA-WDA\)](#), through an Order-In-Council, circumventing a third hearing and public debate on the associated Bill 168. The IHRA-WDA is the product of a growing movement that seeks to [redefine antisemitism](#) to include criticism of the Israeli state. We, the executives, believe that this definition poses a serious threat to critical research and scholarship in Ontario.

Recently, the Trump Administration has begun considering labelling several human rights organizations, (including Amnesty International, Oxfam, and Human Rights Watch), as "[antisemitic](#)," and two Ontario universities have been the site of [false and destructive charges of antisemitism](#) against respected international human rights scholars. These attacks are deeply troubling for us as scholars and teachers. The IHRA-WDA is a direct attack on academic freedom, endangering our ability to engage in scholarship and teaching that explore facts and perspectives that are critical of a foreign state. It can place Ontarian academics at great risk of being falsely accused of being antisemitic, which could result in intimidation, censorship, job precarity, and costly litigation.

The conflation of antisemitism with critique of Israel is dramatically out of step with the views of most Canadians, including the executives at CUPE 3906. No Ontario university has adopted the IHRA-WDA. According to a poll released earlier this month, [80% of Canadians do not believe that criticisms of Israel are antisemitic](#). The Ford government has shown that it is willing to back down on reactionary decisions when it is met with robust public opposition. Strong intervention in defence of academic freedom and the necessary autonomy of university governance can prevent this neo-McCarthyist definition from being used to silence Palestinian rights defenders.

Outlawing and censoring critique of a foreign state in university research and teaching is governmental overreach. Modern universities have been defined and governed as autonomous institutions of learning for a reason. Expectations of institutional autonomy and collegial governance, like that of academic freedom, protect universities from governments or private interests wishing to set limits on what can be researched and what can be taught. Human rights research is as vulnerable to such intrusion as research in pharmaceuticals, energy, white collar crime, foreign relations, or any other potentially contentious research subject.

In solidarity,
The CUPE 3906 Executive Committee