

Giller Prize must not cave to terror-supporting elites

The Giller Prize judges and Scotiabank should ignore the useful idiots of the enemies of our civilization.



Protesters are escorted out of the Four Seasons Hotel by the police after interrupting the Scotiabank Giller Prize ceremony in Toronto, in 2023. Photo by Chris Young/The Canadian Press

by Conrad Black

It is one of the clear signs of the aimlessness and moral decay of a society when large and representative groups of its intellectual class vocally support disreputable or even evil causes. In the same measure, it is a sign of a society's fundamental strength when its intellectual leaders defy the majority and at some risk to themselves support righteous causes when they are oppressed by the authorities. In this last category are such heroic figures as Edmund Burke approving the American revolutionaries and disapproving the French revolutionaries, Wilberforce and Lincoln championing the emancipation of slaves, Emile Zola and Georges Clemenceau upholding Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, and the many culturally prominent supporters of civil rights in the United States from Dorothy Parker to Leonard Bernstein. A special case, commanding respect, are those eminent intellectuals who remain fundamentally loyal to a regional or national civilization even as they recognize that it is in important respects morally insupportable. This would apply to Albert Camus in respect of French Algeria, and William Faulkner in regard to the white Mississippi of olden times. (Both authors were

awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.)

We have seen a very troubling example of the moral enfeeblement of this Canadian society at the last two Giller Prize dinners, where the leading Canadian authors of new works of fiction are annually honoured. In November 2023, the talented and congenial Rick Mercer, as master of ceremonies, was profoundly interrupted at the Giller dinner by people objecting to the sponsorship of the Bank of Nova Scotia because it was a 3.36 per cent shareholder in Elbit Systems Ltd., a company that manufactures ammunition and sells artillery shells to the Israeli Defence Forces. It was alleged that Elbit and Scotiabank were assisting "genocide." It is an abuse, and at a certain scale, a perversion of democracy when angry people inflict great inconvenience on a much larger number of people over something that has nothing to do with those who are being inconvenienced. It has become a tedious but not a dishonest truism that the right to peaceful protest is, as it should be, recognized, but it is not so clear that agitators have any right to disturb those invited to a convivial dinner or rightfully on their way to a public occasion such as a baseball game or the opera. People justly enjoy freedom of expression, but they have no obvious right to inflict serious inconvenience on larger numbers of unoffending people going unexceptionably about their lives.

The last time my wife (Barbara Amiel) and I were invited to the Giller Prize dinner was while the man who endowed the dinner, the late (and much lamented) Jack Rabinovitz, was alive and all the speakers apart from Rick Mercer condemned the popular CBC radio personality Jian Ghomeshi, who had just been accused of physically abusing a number of former girlfriends. Barbara and the late (and also much lamented) Christie Blatchford and I were, to the best of my recollection, the only people who publicly stated that Jian Ghomeshi deserved the benefit of a trial before he was condemned. His trial came and he was acquitted. I tried hard

to find any hint from those who piled onto him while he was accused that they had amended their views. There was only unrepentant silence.

Following the disruption of the 2023 Giller Prize dinner, 1,500 known writers and assorted hangers-on signed a petition demanding that the Bank of Nova Scotia's name be taken off the award night as a sponsor because of its shareholding in Elbit Systems Ltd. The petition included a summary of measures that had allegedly been taken by Israel in the course of its reprisal to the act of war committed against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 by the internationally recognized terrorist organization, Hamas. On that day, all readers will recall, Hamas violated a ceasefire, invaded Israel, murdered 1,200 people, many of them young children, women and the elderly, and took more than 250 hostages. This was an act of war by an organization operating under direction of the principal terrorism-sponsoring country of the world, Iran, which has repeatedly declared that it will never accept the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. Israel was established explicitly as a Jewish state by the United Nations in 1948. All other members of the United Nations either were its co-founders (the five permanent members of the Security Council) or joined as established countries. Israel has the unique international legitimacy of having been established itself by the United Nations out of the old League of Nations Palestine Mandate. Hamas, and presumably its sympathizers who signed the petition against the Bank of Nova Scotia and uttered blood libels on the Jewish state, claim that any Jewish state on the territory of what is now Israel is an illegal and blasphemous profanation, despite Israel's official legitimacy and the fact that the Jewish people have inhabited the Land of Israel for over 5,000 years (more than 3,000 years before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad).

The fact that our literary establishment appears to believe that Israel is not a state but an occupation, that Hamas's

infamous act of war was merely another border skirmish where it is impossible to attribute right and wrong because of Israel's flimsy claim to exist and inadequate claim to its present southwestern borders (which, unlike the border of the West Bank, has rarely been challenged) is distressing. There is no remotely acceptable reason to dispute the right to exist of the State of Israel, though there is room for legitimate discussion about its borders. For nearly 30 years, Israel has acknowledged the right of the Palestinians to an independent state but the Palestinian leaders – in the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas – have all preferred the continuation of violence, which makes them prominent people in the world rather than, as peace would do, just the leaders of another small and dusty Middle Eastern dictatorship. They have preferred to become pawns in the hands of the racist and pseudo-theocratic totalitarian sponsors of terrorism that govern Iran. They are effectively at war not only with the Jewish state but with the legitimate Arab governments, as well.

The Giller petitioners have decried acts that have been committed that are customary in wars. Wars can be differentiated from skirmishes and wars are not conducted by dropping pamphlets, and once wars have been unleashed, their object is victory. In this case, only the Israeli victory over its terrorist enemies will create the possibility and in fact, the strong likelihood, of a durable Middle Eastern peace. Proportionality is nonsense in war: no one told U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt after the Battle of Midway that as the Americans had killed more Japanese than the Japanese killed at Pearl Harbor, it was now time to stop. Nobody said such a thing to President George W. Bush a year after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Hamas, on orders from Iran, wanted and initiated war. Israel has almost won the war, has killed 80 per cent of the Hamas terrorist fighters and has maintained the lowest ratio of civilian to military deaths in the history of urban guerrilla warfare.

Israel is fighting what Woodrow Wilson called “a war to end war,” which was barbarously launched by its enemies. The Giller Prize judges and the Bank of Nova Scotia should ignore these useful idiots of the enemies of our civilization. And all Canadians should do what we can to foster a cultural elite that is worthy of this country.

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