John Bonnett

From: Safs
Sent: November 21, 2023 9:41 AM
To: President's Office; Lesley Rigg
Cc: robert.thomas@uregina.ca; safs@safs.ca; Murray Miles; John Bonnett; Ron Thomson
Subject: PACHRED-sponsored Panel on Palestine

Dr. Leslie Rigg, President
Brock University

Dear Dr. Rigg,

We write to you in our capacity as co-convenors of the Brock chapter of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), a national organization dedicated to maintaining academic freedom in teaching, scholarship, and research and to preserving standards of excellence in academic decisions regarding students and faculty. More information on our organization may found on our national (www.safs.ca) and local (www.safsbrock.ca) websites.

It has come to our attention that an event is scheduled to take place on campus on November 27th entitled: "A Panel on Palestine: Decolonization, International Law, Gender, Media and Solidarity." You can find more information on the planned event here.

Our concern is that this panel discussion — most participants in which are well known for their pro-Palestinian (and anti-Israeli) views (on Toronto Star columnist Shree Paradkar, see here) — is co-sponsored by the President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights, Equity, and Decolonization. From the PACHRED sponsorship, members of the Brock and wider Niagara (including the Jewish) community will quite reasonably conclude that Brock University, and you personally, as President, endorse the highly partisan perspective of the speakers at this event. The issue is neither the obvious bias of the panel nor the right of the organizers to hold such an event. (We insist upon that right.) The issue is solely the University's having taken, or the likelihood of its being widely perceived to have taken, a public stance endorsing one side in a complex moral and (geo-)political debate. That, we submit, is not the role of the institution, not even in domestic, Canadian debates about issues of public policy and social justice. We respectfully urge that steps be taken to disassociate the institution from this event, which is likely to garner (and has already garnered) media attention (See here).

To quote from the Kalven Report on "the University's role in social and political action," commissioned in 1967 by the University of Chicago (to be found in its entirety here: Kalven Committee: Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action (uchicago.edu)): "The instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic." And again: "The neutrality of the university as an institution arises then not from a lack of courage nor out of indifference and insensitivity. It arises out of respect for free inquiry and the obligation to cherish a diversity of viewpoints. And this neutrality as an institution has its complement in the fullest freedom for its faculty and students as individuals to participate in political action and social protest. It finds its complement, too, in the obligation of the university to provide a forum for the most searching and candid discussion of public issues."

These words capture, we believe, the authentic spirit of the University. Brock's current strategic priorities deserve to be re-examined in their light.

Sincerely yours,

John Bonnett

Department of History

Murray Miles
Department of Philosophy

Ron Thomson
Department of Applied Linguistics