

TURKISH CONSUL GENERAL EXPLOITS INTERNEE SUFFERING


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Gary Antourian, Toronto, 10 July 2013

The Toronto Turkish consul general's ongoing attempts to exploit the memory of First World War internees in Ontario, Canada is not an isolated propaganda affair. Ankara has a global campaign in  place to burnish Turkey's image as an up-and-coming important country so as to give weight to its denialist policies on the eve of the centenary of the Genocide of Armenians by Turks. Everywhere Ankara is organizing cultural activities, erecting monuments, commissioning documentaries, exhibiting Ottoman to Hittite artifacts at foreign museums, launching 'Turkish' food festivals... 'Scholarly' articles are being published in for-hire Western journals to spread Turkish lies and all-expenses-paid symposia are organized by Ankara to repeat those same lies. Armenians everywhere should be aware of Ankara's activities and combat Turkey's falsehood machine.

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The Ottoman subjects' internment issue is such a Turkish charade to advance the above strategy. There is much more to the story than what has been stated publicly. Knowingly or unknowingly, some of the players (researches, journalists, elected officials) of this drama are being used by the Turkish propaganda machine. As well, the players have not been forthcoming, and have digressed from the federal government's guidelines and intention when Ottawa established the Canadian World War I Internment Recognition Fund. The federal government did not envision that one day the fund would be hijacked by a handful of people and the fund would become a tool in the hands of a foreign government to conceive divisiveness among Canadians.

A Canadian-Turkish monthly recently reported that the Turkish government and its consul-general in Toronto are preparing to inaugurate a monument at Mount Hope Cemetery in Brantford, dedicated to the memory of the 100-plus Ottoman internees. A high level delegation, headed by a senior advisor to the current Turkish prime minister, will attend the inauguration. There's also talk that a Canadian TV station will cover the sham inauguration.

This is the acme of dishonesty, not only to the Ottoman internees but also to other internees. The overwhelming majority of the 100-plus Ottoman internees were Alawites. The remaining were

Armenian, Greek, Kurd, Syriac and others. The Turkish consul general disdainfully and deliberately is stealing and exploiting the identity of the internees for crass political reasons. Even though he knows the identity of the internees, the consul general insists on victimizing the internees for a second time by asserting that the internees were Turks. The first victimization occurred when the internees fled the Ottoman Empire to escape the persecutions of bloody Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

It is ironic that the representative and the adviser to the Turkish prime minister (who recently suppressed the civil and human rights of his people during the Taksim Square protests) is coming to Canada to give Canadians and their elected officials lessons in democracy, human rights and freedoms. Turkey is distinguished as the country which has jailed more journalists than any country. Do our politicians, journalists, researchers, academics need to learn from or be seen to be associated with such a government and its representatives?

I am wondering if the relatives of the victims and their communities are aware what the Turkish  consul general is planning. How did the mayor of Brantford and city council agree to the Turkish consul general's request to erect a monument in one of their cemeteries? Since when have our municipal governments begun to allow their cemeteries to be used for a foreign government's propaganda?

The Library and Archive Canada website states: "There were no Turkish prisoners in Canada." So why do the Turkish consul general and his Canadian cohorts continue this farce?

I applaud the Ukrainian community for petitioning the government to recognize the injustice of the WWI internments. While this work is commendable, it doesn't give the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA), Mr. Luciuk and others license to collaborate with the Turkish government and its representatives who regularly deny other people's suffering. This is pure hypocrisy.

Since 1999 the UCCLA has not missed an opportunity to suppress the memorialization of the Armenian Genocide. We have often seen the repetition of the deplorable policies of Mr. Gregorovich. Let's suppose for a minute that Mr. Luciuk is an individual with a personal agenda who is not consulting the UCCLA and the fund council. Why then have we not seen a condemnation of such policies or dissociation by the fund council, the UCCLA, and other Ukrainian community representatives?

It is time for the Canadian World War I Internment Recognition Fund Council, internment researcher William Darfler and everyone involved in the story of the internment of the Brantford residents to come clean and set the record straight. The City of Brantford should stop building the monument which is intended to polish the image of a repressive government. As the creator of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, the federal government should step in to stop the Turkish government underhanded games.

We are fortunate to live in a country where we have leaders with the courage and moral fortitude to

apologize for the mistakes of the past and to try to remedy the wrongs of their predecessors. In contrast to our government, the Turkish government has a dismal record--I dare say they have an unmatched history when it comes to the abuse of human rights, the organizing of genocides, and crimes against humanity. When we associate with such scandalous behavior, we damage our country's reputation and do disservice to our forefathers who scarified so much for freedom and democracy.

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