

Carleton's war portfolio: Students demand divestment from apartheid

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General Dynamics. Shell. Apache Corporation. Philip Morris. Pfizer. These are weapons manufacturers, oil companies, mining corporations, tobacco companies and pharmaceutical giants. Notorious war profiteers, environmental destroyers and human rights violators. Morally and ethically, these are not the types of firms with which one would expect Carleton University to have any sort of affiliation.

And yet, despite Carleton President Roseann Runte's characterization of the university as an institution that is "engaged in solving real-world problems," and her proclamation that it emphasizes human rights and social justice, Students Against Israeli Apartheid -- Carleton (SAIA) has discovered that the Carleton University Pension Fund has tens of millions of dollars invested in these and other companies which are willing contributors to the litany of social and political ailments that plague our global community.

The Pension Fund, which provides retirement income for Carleton's staff and faculty, invests in some 550 companies, for a total value of about \$766,194,000. Institutions with pension funds of this size often adopt ethical guidelines or socially responsible investment policies (SRI), which seek to achieve both financial return and social good. SRI encourages investment in companies that protect the environment, respect human rights and have ethical labour practices. In Canada, several universities including McGill, Queens and UBC have adopted elements of SRI, while many institutions in the U.K. have implemented ethical investment guidelines and divested from the arms trade. In the U.S., Yale and other schools have policies prohibiting them from conducting business with companies engaged in "socially injurious" activities.

These relatively progressive investment policies can be sharply contrasted with Carleton's fund, whose only mandate, according to the Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures for the Trust Fund created Under the Carleton University Retirement Plan, is to maximize profit. Carleton appears to have no qualms about investing in and profiting from companies that reap their gains by fuelling wars, spreading ecological devastation, and committing blatant violations of international law.

Beginning this month, SAIA will take action against Carleton's decidedly unethical investment practices by launching a divestment campaign against five companies that are complicit in human rights violations and crimes under international law in Palestine: Motorola, BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, L-3 Communications and Tesco supermarkets.

Motorola, BAE and Northrop Grumman are perhaps the most egregious of the bunch, as they all supplied Israel with military equipment that was used in the 2008-2009 bombardment of Gaza. BAE and Northrop Grumman are among the world's largest arms companies, and their products sold to Israel include components for F-16 aircraft, Hellfire missiles and Apache helicopters. Motorola's involvement in Gaza was through its subsidiary, Motorola Israel, which was the leading Israeli company in developing and manufacturing electronic fuses for aircraft bombs and guided munitions used during the three-week assault.

The Report of the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (the Goldstone Report), released in September, found clear evidence that Israel committed major war crimes and possible crimes against humanity during bombardment of Gaza, which killed over 1,400 people. Many of these crimes would have been committed using the munitions provided by Motorola, BAE and Northrop Grumman.

In the occupied West Bank, meanwhile, Motorola and Tesco actively breach the Fourth Geneva Convention on a daily basis. Article 49 of the Convention states that an occupying power may not change the demographic composition of the occupied territory and must not interfere, in an arbitrary manner, in the lives of the occupied civilian population. This stipulation renders Israel's continued construction of Jewish-only settlements to be illegal.

In defiance of Article 49, Motorola manufactures a multitude of perimeter surveillance systems and "virtual" electronic fences that are installed around dozens of settlements in the occupied West Bank. These virtual fences can often extend up to 700 metres outside of the settlement, thereby confiscating not only the area upon which the settlement is built, but also a vast swath of land around the settlement itself. By establishing such equipment inside the occupied West Bank, Motorola entrenches the infrastructure of occupation, and solidifies illegal settlements as "facts on the ground."

Tesco is also complicit in developing the settlements, as it sells products that originate in the illegal colonies. By selling settlement produce, Tesco ignores the blatant illegality of the settlements, and facilitates their expansion and economic growth. The settlements are allowed to flourish and export their products, while Palestinian agricultural life -- and thus the Palestinian economy -- is decimated.

Furthermore, Tesco's supplier for these settlement products is an Israeli export company called Carmel-Agrexco, which is notorious for implementing slavery-type working conditions in which Palestinian children as young as nine years old are put to work in its factories. Workers in the factory are paid less than \$3 per hour, are not allowed breaks during eight hour shifts, cannot unionize and are forced to work without contracts. Palestinian workers require three hours of travelling time to reach their jobs because they are

forced to cross the Hamra checkpoint, which is the largest in the occupied West Bank. At this and other checkpoints, the workers are often strip-searched and humiliated daily.

Motorola and Tesco's facilitation of settlement expansion and their and development of the settlements themselves renders them in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Additionally, the activities of Motorola and L-3 Communications, a U.S.-based "homeland security and defence" company, put them in contravention of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2004, the ICJ ruled Israel's Apartheid Wall, which cuts deep within occupied Palestinian territory, to be illegal, and declared that no aid or assistance should be given for its construction. In spite of the ICJ decision, both companies continue to supply Israel with equipment such as body scanners, motion sensors and watchtowers, which are used to fortify the Wall and the hundreds of Israeli military checkpoints that control the West Bank.

In essence, each of these firms reaps great benefit by supporting and entrenching the regime of apartheid that has been imposed on the Palestinian people. The companies' actions conflict with Carleton's legal responsibility to adhere to the principles of international law, as stipulated in the Nuremburg Principles I and II. As such, by investing in and profiting from the firms in spite of their crimes, the university itself becomes complicit in violations of international law.

While the legal obligations alone should be sufficient grounds for divestment, there is another strong impetus for SAIA's campaign. In 2005, 171 organizations from the full spectrum of Palestinian civil society came together to call for an international boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law.

Although the Palestine-centred BDS campaign is separate from the more broad-based call for SRI, the two demands are by no means mutually exclusive. Inspired by the movement to boycott South African apartheid, BDS is driven by the idea that it is unacceptable for states, institutions and individuals to continue business as usual relations with Israel as long as it practices apartheid in Palestine. Instead, the international community has a responsibility to end Israeli impunity by cutting ties with apartheid, stripping away Israel's liberal-democratic facade, and exposing it as a pariah state.

For the past four and a half years, BDS has spread like wildfire, becoming a truly global movement. BDS activism is especially strong on university campuses, as student mobilization has brought about many concrete successes worldwide. The most notable victory came at Hampshire College, where in February 2009, the administration gave in to massive student pressure to divest from six companies complicit in the Israeli occupation. Additional successes have come in the U.K., where several universities have agreed to divest from BAE Systems and other companies involved in Israeli crimes.

These victories are models for SAIA's divestment campaign at Carleton, which is the first Palestine-centred divestment initiative in Canada. By mobilizing the university community, SAIA will **call on the administration to immediately divest from the five companies** mentioned here, and to work with the Carleton community to adopt SRI for future investments. Hopes are high that, through a well-planned local campaign, as well as the natural growth of BDS, momentum will pick up at universities across the country and similar initiatives will emerge to form a national movement to cut campus ties with Israeli apartheid.

Adopting SRI would go a long way towards making Carleton a more ethical institution, and would align it with its obligations under international law. Similarly, divesting from these companies would be a major step for the BDS movement, and for the pursuit of justice for the Palestinian people. The international precedents for both actions have been set. The pressure is now on for Carleton to do the right thing.

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