

# Tawdry genocide tale

By Bruce Fein

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Bruce Fein - On Tuesday, Aug. 21, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Abraham H. Foxman, somersaulted from a longstanding ADL policy. The ADL had declined to characterize as genocide the killings of Armenians during World War I by Ottoman Muslims. In Mr. Foxman's change of position hangs a tawdry tale of intellectual dishonor.

On the Friday before, the national director had fired ADL's New England regional director, Andrew H. Tarsy, for defying the national policy of nonendorsement of the genocide. Yet four days later, Mr. Foxman was parroting the regional director whom he had just fired.

Four days is not much time to study an issue as complex as the Armenian genocide narrative — especially when proper deductions are made for the ordinary inclination to devote the lion's share of weekends more to leisure than to lucubration.

Mr. Foxman, moreover, did not claim to have perused the works of impressive scholars who dispute the Armenian genocide claim. The list would include Bernard Lewis and Heath Lowry of Princeton, Guenther Lewy of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Justin McCarthy of the University of Louisville, and Professor Norman Stone, who taught at Cambridge and Oxford in Great Britain for 30 years before retiring early from the chair of modern history.

Mr. Foxman also did not assert even a passing acquaintance with the meaning of genocide as recently expounded by the International Court of Justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro (Feb. 26, 2007). There the court declared: "It is not enough to establish... that deliberate unlawful killings of members of a group have occurred.... It is not enough that the members of the group are targeted because they belong to that group, that is because the perpetrator has a discriminatory intent. The acts listed in [the Genocide Convention] must be done with intent to destroy the group in whole or in part."

Mr. Foxman voiced no rebuttal to the credible evidence undermining an Armenian genocide. During World War I, many Armenians were killed because they had defected to the enemy and were slaughtering Ottoman Muslims. Others were suspected of treason or disloyalty. The vast majority of Armenian casualties were occasioned by wretchedly executed deportations undertaken by the Ottoman government for war purposes. In 1916, the Ottomans themselves prosecuted about 1,300 soldiers and civilians for crimes against the Armenian deportees. One governor was executed. Tens of thousands of Armenians in Istanbul, Izmir and Aleppo were left undisturbed.

As Bernard Lewis has observed, an analogy would have been if Adolf Hitler had left Jews in Berlin, Frankfurt and Vienna exempt from the Final Solution. For more than three centuries, under the Ottoman millet system, Armenians enjoyed religious, cultural and social harmony. Conflict with the Ottoman Empire was largely provoked by Armenian terrorism and plotting secession comparable to the Confederate States of America, not by a late-blooming desire to destroy Armenians as a group.

It seems self-evident something other than the truth about the Armenian genocide claim was at work with Mr. Foxman. That suspicion was reinforced in an Aug. 22 interview with the Boston Globe. He unconvincingly asserted that for an unstated time he had held a private conviction that Armenians had suffered genocide, but thought characterizing their mass killings by the Ottoman Empire as atrocities or massacres was a sufficient description.

But he was provoked to go public with his true belief because the Jewish community was fracturing over endorsing the Armenian genocide. As reported in the Globe, he elaborated: "So if that word [genocide]

brings the community together, that's fine.... In this time, for us to be split apart on an issue, which, as important as it is, is not foremost on the agenda of our safety and security, I found very troubling. I therefore did what I did to bring the community together."

Mr. Foxman's explanation is dubious. He is to ADL what Moses was to the Jews. It strains credulity to believe ADL would have balked at any time over his desire to officially acknowledge an Armenian genocide. Indeed, when Mr. Foxman did so on Aug. 21, there was no audible ADL protest.

The national director declared he had suppressed his opinion over the Armenian genocide because he believed an open ADL endorsement would anger Turkey and jeopardize both Jews living there and Israeli-Turkish relations. But when nonendorsement began to divide the Jewish community, Mr. Foxman believed its splintering was more dangerous to Jewish safety or security than any rift with Turkey. Accordingly, the ADL altered its longstanding position.

This gets to the crux of the matter. The Armenian genocide question should be settled by truth, not by the political calculations of Mr. Foxman or any other influential figure. The strength of the Armenian lobby or the geostrategic importance of Turkey to the United States should also be irrelevant.

The government of Turkey has opened its archives for more research and has supported further examination of the genocide question through debate and evaluation before an impartial body. Armenians have not reciprocated with either archival openness or willingness to debate as opposed to denigrate or intimidate scholars who question the genocide. Mr. Foxman should be exerting his energies to convince the Armenians to join the debate in lieu of jumping on their bandwagon and endorsing their conclusion for ulterior motives.

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