

10 April 2007

The Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., Ed.D.
President De Paul University
1 E. Jackson
Chicago, Illinois 60604
Fax: 312-362-7577

Dear Father Holtschneider:

I write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern regarding the tenure case of Professor Norman Finkelstein.

We fear that the generally accepted academic procedures which should have been used to evaluate Professor Finkelstein's scholarship, and thus his qualifications for promotion to tenure, may have been unduly politicized. We are particularly concerned that Professor Finkelstein has apparently been subjected to a campaign waged by an influential senior scholar outside his field from another university, which is designed to undermine his candidacy for tenure, on ideological rather than scholarly grounds.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

We recognize that some people may regard Professor Finkelstein's scholarship as controversial. He has certainly engaged in some of the most charged debates about the history and historiography of the Arab-Israeli conflict and other topics. In the context of Professor Finkelstein's interventions in these debates he has had several highly publicized exchanges with Professor Alan Dershowitz of the Harvard University Law School, whose book *The Case for Israel* (Wiley, 2003) Professor Finkelstein has subjected to scathing criticism on a variety of grounds.

According to *Inside Higher Ed* as well as a widely disseminated report by Professor Jon Wiener in *The Nation*, Professor Dershowitz went to extraordinary lengths to prevent the publication of Professor Finkelstein's critique *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (University of California Press, 2004).¹ Those reports indicate that Professor Dershowitz authorized what Professor Wiener described as "threatening letters" to the counsel, to the university regents, to the university

¹ (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/06/27/dershowitz>);
(<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050711/wiener>)

provost, to seventeen directors of the press and to nineteen members of the press's faculty editorial committee. Professor Dershowitz also appealed to the governor of California to stop the publication of the book. Fortunately, both the University of California Press and the governor's office defended the principle of academic freedom in this case and refused to stop the publication of Professor Finkelstein's book.

According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* story dated 5 April 2007, Professor Dershowitz has admitted to sending a dossier critical of Professor Finkelstein to members of DePaul's Law School and of its political science department. We regard this blatant and entirely unsolicited intervention in a tenure case by a very well-known faculty member from a different university as unacceptable. We fear that it may have unduly politicized and/or prejudiced your university's consideration of Professor Finkelstein's candidacy for tenure. This intervention is particularly distressing because it comes at a time when we have witnessed other instances of efforts by individuals or organizations to influence hiring, tenure or promotion decisions, based not on the candidate's scholarship but rather on his or her political views, real or imputed.

We also note that a memorandum dated 22 March 2007 and written by Chuck Suchar, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at DePaul University, to the University Board on Tenure and Promotion seems to conflate the tone of Professor Finkelstein's work with the substance of his scholarship. We would like to remind you that the American Association of University Professors clearly stipulates that scholars are to be evaluated strictly on the basis of their scholarship's academic merit and their teaching – not on their collegiality, nor on whether some may deem their scholarly work too controversial. In this regard we are also concerned that Dean Suchar's memorandum seems to judge Professor Finkelstein on the basis of his alleged failure to conform to what the dean describes as the "Vincentian value of 'personalism,'" which is not generally accepted as a proper criterion for promotion to tenure.

We understand that Professor Finkelstein's tenure evaluation is not yet concluded. We urge you and your colleagues to ensure that that evaluation henceforth proceeds in a manner that conforms to generally accepted procedures, such that Professor Finkelstein is evaluated solely on the basis of his scholarship, his teaching, and his service to the DePaul community and to the academic fields in which he works.

Sincerely,

Zachary Lockman
MESA President