

## From *Both Sides*:

'Class, I would next like to introduce Mark Mazur, our second speaker this morning. He is going to talk about the recent Facebook controversy. I'm sure we've all heard about it. Certain posts were not published at first, but then appeared later, after a reaction against the company. Mr. Mazur!'

The second speaker was evidently Jewish, and religious, wearing a kipa. He was tall and very thin, with a neatly trimmed beard and a friendly face. After being introduced, he stood up from his chair near the front of the room and walked over to the lectern, where he placed his notes. He was soft-spoken, with an easy and confident manner. 'Good morning' he said to the class, with a smile. 'When I read about this recent Facebook controversy, I naturally read some of the posts that had not appeared for so-called "technical reasons". They were published a few days later, after people had complained that Facebook had shown an anti-Palestinian bias, by deliberately blocking the posts. Of course, this is not the first time that Facebook has faced these kinds of accusations, sometimes because they *do* allow certain posts. For example, when they published all the lies and distortions from Trump's supporters, during the election campaign and after.'

'There are three main questions here. First of all, is it just a coincidence that many of those posts - I didn't try to read more than ten or so - promoted a completely one-sided picture of the recent war between Israel and Hamas? Secondly, does Facebook have the legal right, and perhaps the moral responsibility, to not publish whatever it deems to be inappropriate? Are Palestinian-run websites held to the same moral standards? Do we insist they publish pro-Israeli posts, balancing these with opposite points of view? Or do we think they should be free to decide which posts to publish and in what numbers? Thirdly, and what is most relevant to this course, is why did Facebook backtrack? Why did the policy change, with the posts being published after all? Was it political correctness, catering to an offended group, rather than just sticking to an otherwise reasonable and clearly defensible editorial stance?'

'I'm Jewish, so some people might try to diminish what I have to say because of a perceived bias. Of course, such an ad hominem assumption of bias could be made against detractors as well. In any event, let me first summarize what I consider to be a truthful, balanced view of the war. To begin, the loss of life and the destruction of property, the traumatization of

people, especially children, on both sides, is absolutely horrible. These are the terrible costs and results of war. However we measure the consequences, it is obvious there cannot only be a picture from one side. Hamas sent literally thousands of missiles into Israel, killing people and destroying property. The effects were greatly reduced because the Israelis were able to shoot down most of those bombs before they landed. Hamas fired those missiles with the intention of killing whomever they happened to kill, destroying whatever property they happened to strike. They were aimed more or less randomly. Consequences in return, to the population of Gaza, were horrendous. There were - '

At that moment, one of the other students interrupted, a woman wearing a hijab, sitting near the front of the class. She stood up, looking directly at the speaker. Speaking with an Arabic accent, her tone was fierce and accusatory. She was essentially shouting. 'You are killing children' she said to the speaker. 'You are destroying hospitals. You are killing innocent people.'

Professor Latchman was somewhat caught off guard, but he quickly moved to stop the woman's outburst. Having spoken to her on a few previous occasions, he knew her name was Jamila Fayad, and that she was an immigrant from Syria, having settled in the area a few years before, with her parents and siblings. She was one of four religious Muslims in the class, three female and one male. The others were seated side-by-side in the row behind her. In a class that consisted mostly of people of color, they hadn't particularly stood out during the previous weeks of the course. As occurred to Latchman in this moment, this was likely because the course topics had centred almost completely around anti-Black racism and issues involving sexual identity.

Latchman, seated at the front of the room right beside the speaker, stood up and made a restraining gesture to the woman with his right hand. It was abundantly clear to him that the situation could easily escalate if he didn't quickly take control. 'Please. I must ask you to stop, Ms. Fayad. Please sit down' he said, in a firm, resolute tone, addressing the woman as he did all of his students, using her last name. 'You will have an opportunity to comment once the speaker has finished. Please allow the speaker to make his presentation. We have all agreed that there will be no comments until these presentations have been completed. And please, remember not to attack people personally. We can strongly disagree with what someone says, but let us challenge what has been said. No personal attacks or insinuations. That is very important. Okay. Mr. Mazur, please continue.'

'Thank you, Professor Latchman' said the young speaker, apparently unrattled by the outburst. 'Justifying war and conflict and killing might be called a fool's job' he continued. 'Yet, if people are not provided with an accurate historical picture of conflict, it can make the situation worse and lead to further violence and injustice. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Our country and other western countries have declared this to be the case. Their only goal in relation to Israel is quote, to drive the Jews into the sea. The idea of a peace treaty or peaceful co-existence is not even a possibility. The claims made about land can - '

Again Jamila Fayad stood up, confronting the speaker in the same defiant, angry way. 'You must end the occupation' she said. 'You must give back our land. You are killing our people. We have the right to fight for the liberation.'