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Armenian genocide still haunts Turkey

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ON April 24, in cities across the United States and around the world, people remembered the 1.5 million Armenians murdered by the government of Turkey during the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

The commemoration in the U.S. includes gratitude for efforts by Americans during that period to save countless Armenian lives and opening the doors of this country as a haven from the brutality of Turkey's armed forces.

The U.S. ambassador to Turkey between 1913-1916, Henry Morgenthau, wrote of this first modern example of genocide in his memoirs. "When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact . . . I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this," Morgenthau wrote.

Morgenthau did not realize what similar horrors awaited the human race a few decades later when the German Nazis would take their turn in race extermination.

Sadly, on April 24 the San Gabriel Valley Newspaper Group fell victim to the Armenian genocide denial campaign perpetrated by today's government of Turkey when the newspapers printed an opinion piece by Jason Epstein that attempted to cleverly cast doubt on the historical facts surrounding the Armenian Genocide and whether it should be commemorated.

GUEST VIEW

Epstein is a former legislative director for B'nai B'rith International, a prominent Jewish organization that, among the issues it promotes, works to build racial tolerance and awareness of issues having to do with genocide. It would seem logical that someone with Jason Epstein's background would be sensitive to Holocaust deniers and other races who suffered genocide.

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent Mr. Epstein doesn't follow that logic.

According to Justice Department records, he has been paid a substantial price by the Turkish government as a lobbyist — to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Since his time at B'nai B'rith, Epstein has crossed over and joined the paid army of lobbyists and public relations soldiers who have been hired by Turkey. These people spend their days distorting the facts of history in a losing battle to deny the Armenian Genocide, much like today's Holocaust deniers.

The Turkish government's decades-long Armenian genocide denial campaign, in which Epstein is a bit player, spends millions every year attempting to wipe the blood of genocide victims off the government's hands. This failed policy has prevented Turkey from joining the civilized world and will continue to be a barrier as it attempts to join the European Union. Turkey's government must mature and come to terms with its history.

Instead, the government prosecutes

and persecutes Turkish citizens for speaking the truth about the Armenian Genocide.

At the same time, the Turkish government attempts to export its gag rule on free speech about the Armenian Genocide to the U.S. by blackmailing our Congress into not speaking the truth with threats to cut off northern supply lines to our troops in Iraq.

The Armenian National Committee of America and other American community, academic and political organizations and hundreds of elected officials such as our own Congressman Adam Schiff work hard every day to properly recognize the Armenian Genocide.

At its core, these efforts aim to align our government's policies on these issues with our fundamental American values of respect for human rights.

Epstein, given his past, should find his lost integrity and concentrate his efforts on breaking the cycle of genocide in the world instead of protecting the perpetrators of genocide denial. This would be a more productive use of his time instead of lecturing the Armenian American community, which is very proud of its contributions to this society, as well as helping the growing democracy in Armenia.

But then again, perhaps Epstein is not interested in representing that side of the issue because there is little money to be made defending victims of genocide or standing for justice and what is right.

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