

“Israeli Apartheid Week”: Carleton University Administration violates free expression – bans and confiscates posters

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Carleton University Administration violates free expression – bans and confiscates posters

Write to Carleton University president to demand the restoration of student rights

February 18, 2009

On February 8, Students Against Israeli Apartheid at Carleton University put up 100 posters for “Israeli Apartheid Week”, a series of lectures and public events that will occur on campuses in over 40 cities around the world. On February 9, these posters were taken down at the request of Carleton’s Equity Services, under the rationale that the posters “could be seen to incite others to infringe rights protected in the Ontario Human Rights code” and are “insensitive to the norms of civil discourse in a free and democratic society”

The poster was created by noted cartoonist Carlos Latuff and depicts a situation – a child being killed by aerial bombardment ? that occurred over 430 times in Israel’s latest attack on Gaza according to United Nations reports. [We encourage everyone to view the poster.](#) Since it depicts a situation that has a factual basis and its intention is clearly to invite people to a lecture series, the notion that it is an incitement or a violation to norms of civil discourse is preposterous.

This is part of a wider pattern of repression of academic freedom and rights to free expression, especially on Israel/Palestine, on Canadian campuses, including Carleton University. It is accompanied by double standards. When 56 Carleton professors asked President Roseanne Runte to condemn Israel’s bombardment of the Islamic University of Gaza, the President refused. Neither the direct killing of hundreds of children nor the direct bombing of a campus are enough to elicit condemnation, but her administration has decided that a poster inviting people to discuss the conflict ought to be banned. Instead of being lauded by their university, students affirming the humanity of all peoples and the universality of international law have been threatened by Carleton University’s Provost with expulsion.

The Carleton administration had already taken a biased political stand on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and is now violating free expression to prevent alternative views. Both the current and former Carleton Presidents have taken very clear positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict by condemning the academic boycott of Israel out of hand, offering no alternative to this justice-oriented civil-society initiative. Students and faculty at Carleton

have requested that the administration hold a public debate on the issue, to allow the Carleton community to determine the most responsible course of action, yet have been repeatedly rebuffed.

Far from defending human rights, the Carleton administration is treating them with contempt. In a memo to students on February 12, the Provost wrote that “all reported incidents of racial or religious intolerance will be investigated vigorously and addressed regardless of the persons or groups involved.” The administration should begin a vigorous investigation of its own behaviour, including its discrimination against students who seek an open debate on a political issue but are being silenced because they happen to disagree with the president’s stand.

That Carleton’s administration is using human rights grounds to violate free expression on its campus is a double insult. Internationally, the movement against Israeli apartheid has been endorsed by hundreds of universities, unions, religious groups and social justice organizations. This campaign is proudly anti-racist, and founded on the principles of opposition to all forms of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. It draws its inspiration from the global campaign to end South African apartheid and is led by many of the same individuals who were at the forefront of that earlier struggle. By contrast, the administration that banned the poster could not summon enough concern for human rights or the right to education to speak against the bombing of a Gazan university.

SAIA Carleton demands that the Carleton University administration:

1. Immediately lift the ban on the Israeli Apartheid Week poster and publicly apologize for the banning.
2. Explain, publicly and precisely, how the profound error of banning the poster was made and address how to prevent such violations from occurring in future.
3. Sponsor a full public debate- ensuring generous access to the entire university community- on Carleton’s position on the proposed institutional boycott of Israeli academic institutions.
4. Appoint a university/community Commission to investigate the record of the University in relation to democratic discourse and equity around issues of Palestine solidarity.

This attempt to repress free expression will ultimately fail. The Carleton University administration should understand that debates on campuses on some of the most important human rights questions of our times cannot be silenced by administrative rulings.

We call on student organizations, social justice groups and concerned individuals around the world to support students at Carleton and the broader fight for freedom of expression.

Please take the following actions:

* Immediately email the Carleton University President, Roseanne Runte, at presidents_office@carleton.ca demanding that she immediately restore the Charter rights of Carleton students and send a copy of your message of support to Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA Carleton) at saia.carleton@gmail.com

* Call or fax Carleton University President, Roseanne Runte, at 613 520-3801(phone) or 613

520-4474 (fax) demanding that she immediately restore the Charter rights of Carleton students.

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