

As part of both the queer and Jewish communities, I come to ask the council to think carefully about the pressure that has been brought to bear both here and on Pride Toronto regarding certain words about a certain country. I stand here before you today concerned that only one kind of Jewish voice is being heard or given legitimacy: that of the pro-Zionist. As an anti-Zionist Jew I find it reprehensible that some members of the Jewish community would have you believe that there is only one valid opinion regarding the Israeli government's policies vis-à-vis Palestinians and Palestine; I am also a Jewish tradition. As a lesbian I find it offensive that there is an effort to erase the political from Queer Pride. As a human being, I find it despicable that a country, which flouts international law on a daily basis, is allowed to operate with impunity. And yes, I am a member of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). I am also a part of Women in Solidarity with Palestine, formerly the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation (JWCEO). We have for many years now marched in both the Dyke March and the Pride Parade with signs and banners calling for an end to the occupation and in more recent years, an end to Israeli apartheid. Last year we marched with QuAIA, and there was violence: but it was directed at us. There are three incidents registered with the police, including one where a bottle was tossed at our contingent from a second story window on Yonge Street, and yet we are the ones who are to be removed from our rightful place in this parade. The claim that Pride is only about queer rights and fighting homophobia effectively erases the roots and the long history of the politics of Pride, which grew out of the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements of the Sixties. I have marched as a pro-choice activist, as part of the struggle against U.S. intervention in Central and South America, and against militarism in many a Pride parade. Not once has anyone claimed that these issues were not part of the parade. To say that Pride is only about being queer erases effectively other parts of our identities. If Pride is about unity, then why the separation: the apart-pride?

That councillors in this chamber, in cooperation with outside lobbyists, have put pressure on Pride Toronto to ban QuAIA else lose their funding is beyond reproach. Pride Toronto responded by banning the use of the words, "Israeli apartheid," mirroring the

motion in the Ontario Provincial legislature condemning Israeli Apartheid Week in February, and many other efforts to quash any criticism of Israel that falls outside of the boundaries of critique determined by supporters of Israel.

Why is it impermissible to say “Israeli apartheid”? According to the International Criminal Court, apartheid is defined as a crime against humanity characterized by many acts, including murder, deportation or forcible transfer of population, “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”[1] In 2002, the Israeli Human Rights group, B’tselem, stated: “Israel has created in the Occupied Territories a regime of separation based on discrimination, applying two separate systems of law in the same area and basing the rights of individuals on their nationality. This regime...is reminiscent of...the apartheid regime in South Africa.”

Does the bulldozing of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem to make way for Israeli settlements not constitute a crime? Does the crisscrossing of the West Bank, supposedly part of the future Palestinian state, with a system of Jewish-only roads not establish a system of separation? Does the brutal bombing of Gaza in late 2008, early 2009, in which 1,417 Palestinians were killed in 23 days, including over 400 {typo here: meant 300} children, not qualify as a crime against humanity? And finally, does Israel’s ability, according to Military Order Number 1229, to hold Palestinians in administrative detention for up to six months without charge or trial not contribute to the collective punishment of Palestinians? Please note that these six-month detentions can be renewed indefinitely, and that this military order is only one of 2500 such laws that govern the lives of Palestinians, some of who are...queer.

QuAIA has been characterized as a group that promotes hatred. This line of reasoning flows out of the poisonous well of thought that views any disapproval of Israeli policy as tainted by antisemitism, and self-hatred if you happen to be Jewish. Earlier this year, Holocaust survivor Hajo Meier toured Europe talking about how “Never Again” meant

never again for anyone, not just Jews. One of the vice-chairs of the English Zionist Federation referred to Mr. Meier as a dancing bear. Another Holocaust survivor, Hedy Epstein, who has taken part in the Free Gaza boats, has been cast as a “fake Holocaust survivor.” [2] If Jewish people who have endured the Nazi genocide of the thirties and forties cannot speak up about what is occurring in Israel and Palestine without being branded “traitors” and “fakes,” is it any wonder that those of us who have the temerity to speak up about the Israeli policies of apartheid are being censored? Add to this the current climate of Islamophobia, where if one is a Muslim or of Arabic background, one is a suspect; and consider in such an atmosphere who might not feel as welcome at the Pride parade.

QuAIA is part of the Palestine solidarity movement, and one of the primary reasons for our coming together is the cynical use of the language of queer rights by the state of Israel to draw attention away from its policies and practices towards Palestinians. In effect, we oppose the pink-washing of Israeli war crimes. We are very well aware that in 1988 Israel decriminalized homosexuality, and certainly that is to be applauded. However, Palestinian queers in the West Bank and Gaza face the very same forms of discrimination as do Palestinian straights: checkpoints, the threat of administrative detention at the whim of the Israeli Army and Border Patrol, lack of freedom of movement due to hundreds of checkpoints and earthen barriers scattered throughout the West Bank, the enclosing of many villages in the West Bank by either an 8-metre-high concrete wall or a fence, the control of all entry points into and out of Gaza, and the control of most water resources by Israel. Is this a queer issue? You bet it is. Homophobia exists everywhere, and every movement for liberation has its share of queer people who are part and parcel of those movements. The efforts to stifle criticism of Israeli policy are part of a larger campaign to criminalize dissent, in Jewish and other communities. Writing in the Los Angeles Times in March of 2009, Ben Ehrenreich states, “The characterization of anti-Zionism as an “epidemic” more dangerous than anti-Semitism reveals only the unsustainability of the position into which Israel’s apologists have been forced. Faced with international

condemnation, they seek to limit the discourse, to erect walls that delineate what can and can't be said.”

I call on you all to not cave in to such McCarthyite demands. Do not become the HUAC of the North. I urge you to pressure Pride Toronto to rescind its ban of the phrase “Israeli Apartheid” and to officially confirm the accepted participation of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid. Stand up against censorship and dare to stand up for justice.

[1] http://untreaty.un.org/cod/icc/statute/99_corr/2.htm

[2] www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/7114

sue goldstein, 14 June 2010