

RE: Whose Interests are you Serving??

The following open response was sent to Manitoba MLA Heather Stefanson on April 14, 2010, answering her form email sent to those concerned about her motion "Denouncing Israeli Apartheid Week."

Who Is Promoting Racism?

Open Response to Manitoba MLA Heather Stefanson:

I just received the email, sent on your behalf, regarding the "debate" you say you are interested in having in the Manitoba Legislature. A reasonable and informed debate, you further state. However, given your statement (1) last month when this issue first came up, we seriously question any possibility of an open debate when certain parties have already said that Israeli Apartheid Week is something we should "condemn.. and eliminate". We and many other concerned people in Canada have long called for an open and transparent debate on Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East and particularly on Israel/Palestine. However your party, the PC Party, nationally and now provincially, is instead singling out a small group of students for expressing an opinion you do not agree with. If any students feel unsafe on campus, it is these brave students who are trying to speak truth to power about what is really happening in Israel/Palestine and why Canadians should be concerned and are now being met with legislative censorship, intended to set a chill on campus activities.

As I said in my first email, let's have a full debate. I even offered a few points for discussion that you refused to answer. When Palestinian Christians need special passes to pray in Jerusalem at Easter, when tens of thousands of Palestinians are facing expulsion from the West Bank for not having the correct Israeli Military permits (passes), then we say the time is ripe for Canadians to stand up and call on all levels of our government to question this uncritical support for Israeli government policies. We find it deeply offensive that you have labelled the students organizing IAW and all people in Canada asking these questions as being the "scourge of racism"(1). They represent a growing sector of the community (including many Jews and Semites) who serve no political lobby group, have no hidden political agenda and are simply working for what they feel serves the search for a genuine peace in Israel/Palestine. Some MPs in the House of Commons recognized this fact and that is why a similar resolution there was defeated last month. We can only hope that the Manitoba Legislature will have the same insight and dedication to genuine and open free speech.

Hanna Kawas

(1). http://www.heatherstefanson.com/news_det.asp?ID=706

See also: http://cpavancouver.org/Jason_Kenney_is_Promoting_Racism.doc

From: Kathleen.Cook@leg.gov.mb.ca
To: hkawas@msn.com
Date: Wed, 14 Apr 2010 11:18:28 -0500
Subject: RE: Whose Interests are you Serving??

Please see below a response that I am sending on behalf of Heather Stefanson.

Thank you for your recent letter to my colleagues and I regarding our proposed resolution, entitled "Denouncing Israeli Apartheid Week." I am pleased to respond on behalf of our Leader, Hugh McFadyen, and my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Caucus.

It is important to note at the outset that a resolution provides for an hour of debate in the Manitoba Legislature. It is not legislation, and thus would not have the effect of making Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) illegal. Therefore it does not infringe on anyone's right to freedom of speech, but allows us, as legislators, to express our views and the views of our constituents on the subject.

Our primary concern with Israeli Apartheid Week is its divisiveness, and the fear and anti-Semitism that it engenders on Manitoba university campuses. We believe everyone should have the right to feel safe on our campuses and that no individual group should be marginalized.

As the sponsor of this resolution, I am using my right of free speech to denounce hate, fear, and divisiveness on our university campuses. I believe that there are other, more effective ways to have a reasoned, respectful and informed debate on this subject.

Sincerely,

Heather Stefanson, MLA Tuxedo