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Censorship makes strange bedfellows



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Within the campus political milieu there is no doubt some overlap among the radical pro-choice movement and the radical anti-Israel movement.

Not entirely, though, as I'm sure some of the more Islamist elements of the anti-Israel movement are not exactly fervent supporters of a woman's right to choose. Indeed, abortion is forbidden within the Palestinian Authority.

Nonetheless, given that support for abortion and opposition to Israel — the latter in the spotlight this week with the ridiculous "Israeli Apartheid Week" — are

both acceptable beliefs in the eyes of the Campus Political Overlords, surely now they must see the trap they've set for themselves.

As the U of C's student union happily stood by and acquiesced to the university's decision to censor Campus Pro-Life, it seemed as though little thought was given to the implication of the university's actions.

The university deemed Campus Pro-Life's "Genocide Awareness Project" display to be "offensive" and the politically correct masses concurred. None demanded further explanation as to how a determination of "offensive" was reached or would be in the future.

Now, the same forces that would gleefully gag pro-life groups are suddenly aghast at the decision by Carleton University and the University of Ottawa to ban an anti-Israel poster. These universities, we're told, are

guilty of unfair, arbitrary censorship. You don't say.

Of course, just as the Genocide Awareness Project could objectively be described as offensive in nature, the same is true of this particular poster.

It depicts an Israeli military helicopter killing a Palestinian child (complete with clutched teddy bear). Given the ugly history of the Jews-kill-children libel, there are some disturbing overtones to an already offensive poster.

However, banning a poster which echoes an ancient conspiracy theory is an effective way to fuel another conspiracy theory: that of undue Jewish influence — a.k.a. the notorious "Zionist Lobby."

Strange, then, that these all-powerful conspirators are unable to prevent Israeli Apartheid Week or to silence anti-Israel professors and students. Nor have they

prevented the intimidation of Jewish and pro-Israel student groups. All-powerful conspiracies ain't what they used to be, I guess.

If the supporters of Israeli Apartheid Week and this controversial poster truly believe in a free exchange of ideas, they ought to mean it. They need to accept the presence of pro-Israel views, speakers, and counter events. Let's remember that intimidation is censorship, too.

Ask former (and possibly the next) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about his visit to Concordia University. Ask former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak about his visit to Concordia (oops, never mind — they didn't let him come speak).

As for the poster, rather than complaining about it, concerned students should respond in kind — perhaps a poster depicting a teddy-bear-clutching Jewish child

about to be obliterated by a suicide bomber. Or, highlight the extent to which Israeli hospitals treat seriously ill Palestinian children, free of charge in most cases.

There's probably something to be said for the argument that universities are becoming too political, period. If such an argument is to take root, though, it needs to prevail in the very same arena of ideas.

That argument may be winning: many students, it seems, want nothing to do with campus politics. Some of the most political campuses have the lowest turnout for student government elections.

Universities don't have to be entirely passive, either. Just as warning signs once accompanied the U of C Campus Pro-Life display, universities concerned about the anti-Israel poster could respond in a similar fashion. That would mean

allowing the poster in the first place, which is as it should be.

Perhaps opponents of the anti-abortion movement, now attuned to the consequences of suppressing points of view, can find the principle to defend Campus Pro-Life — while still condemning its message.

They'll apparently have their chance, as the "Genocide Awareness Project" display is set to go up once again on March 18 and 19.

It may be tempting to see your opponents silenced, but arbitrary censorship will turn on you eventually. Your cause, your event, or your poster may be next.

Whether you're anti-Israel or anti-abortion, the slippery slope should be obvious.

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