

Letters protest expulsion of board member from Detroit architects' group

13 March 2003

The World Socialist Web Site is publishing below letters sent to protest the expulsion of Tim Nichols from the board of directors of a Detroit architects group known as FLAK. Nichols, a founding member and secretary of the group, played a leading role in organizing a FLAK public forum last November that included Eyal Weizman, an Israeli architect and co-creator of an exhibit that documents the oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The forum was held at the Museum of New Art (MONA) in Detroit and moderated by David Walsh, the arts editor of the WSWS.

Soon after the forum, Nichols was expelled from the FLAK board in an act of political censorship and victimization.

In a March 5 article "Detroit architects group expels member for political beliefs," the WSWS urged architects, artists and readers to write to the FLAK board, care of the group's president, Rochelle Martin, to demand that it rescind Nichols' expulsion. We reprint a number of these letters below.

Dear Rochelle,

Please rescind Mr. Tim Nichols' expulsion. We still have free speech? Your organization has acted more as if it were the Taliban. Thank you.

A

To: Rochelle Martin, Professor, LTU and president of FLAK and Architects and Organizers of the FLAK Movement in Detroit

Dear academic colleagues:

Underneath the bleached and sanitized exterior view of academia lies a variety of landscapes, some bright, some dark—with degrees of decay usually in measure to the dimness of the light permitted to reach the requisite corner. The most dangerous deficiencies of the academy are not the occasional very public and sharp debates—signatory of philosophical tectonics which will carve out new terrain in a discipline—but those debates which are not allowed to happen, or which are brought to an end not through dialectical synthesis or even the proof of the impossibility of a synthesis—but through brute suppression.

I follow occasional architectural currents, but maintain a most active interest in the health of our academic systems. I therefore note with some bitter irony the principled and lofty ideals quoted at the very beginning of your web site [<http://www.flakdetroit.com/LINKS.HTML>]:

[FLAK] is a movement of architects and other creative people fueled by open dialogue and critical evaluation. We defend intellectual freedom, oppose all forms of censorship, and offer

sanctuary to all creative individuals. We believe inventive, sensitive and humane visions are, not only relevant, but urgently needed for Detroit and for the world. Our membership is open to everyone who agrees with these principles. Our aim is to elevate awareness and rejuvenate culture. Thus, we challenge ourselves and the creative community.

and by the stark and ugly reality concerning your recent behavior as democratic colleagues.

According to my sources, the facts are not in debate that your board removed your secretary, Tim Nichols, who had been appointed by the membership at large, through a star chamber session which reminds one rather more of a Hollywoodish Evil World Organization than of a distinguished body of academic colleagues. The manner in which the dismissal was carried out is indefensible—but the accusations themselves do not pass any reasonable muster as well.

I am familiar with the work of Eyal Weizman, and I would have agreed with Mr. Nichols that he would be a splendid addition to a panel showcasing new thought in architecture. I also know of and greatly admire the arts criticism which has been written by David Walsh, and salute his involvement in the November exhibition which seems to have been the nominal casus belli for the recent actions.

If your members have principled disagreements with Weizman, Walsh, and Nichols, then one can only say "meet them in academic combat." Instead, your board has chosen to ignore the original mandate of its membership and eliminate from discussion concepts and ideas unpleasant to some of its leadership through rank censorship. "Sanctuary to all creative individuals"? "Open dialogue and critical evaluation"? The academy and FLAK deserve better. Revisit your decision. Practice what you preach.

DB

Ithaca, New York

To the FLAK board, care of Rochelle Martin

I am concerned that Tim Nichols was expelled from FLAK through a questionable politically motivated action.

This is of concern to people in Australia as architects here are very influential in matters of urban design and conservation.

Heaven forbid that organisation of architects in Australia might follow the US example.

L

Concerned Australian

Dear Ms. Martin:

The news that your group, FLAK, expelled (with considerable

deceit and hypocrisy) Tim Nichols from its board for expressing his beliefs in socialism and his opposition to Democratic politicians in Detroit is just another disheartening example of the daily chipping away of what little freedom remains in this benighted country. Is this how you defend intellectual freedom? What sort of sanctuary are you offering a creative individual when you demand that his creativity comply with previously unstated norms or not offend “numerous individuals” who threaten to resign because his free speech is apparently too free for them? Whatever happened to your reported goal of promoting new ideas and open exchange of opinions? Anti-capitalism, it seems, and criticism of Democrats are, in your view, ideas so toxic that even being in the same room with them sends you into a panic. I congratulate you on your contribution to the return of red-baiting and your success in imposing an agenda of your own on FLAK.

If you are serious about the stated goals of FLAK, Mr. Nichols’ expulsion should be rescinded immediately. Not to do so makes those goals—and the existence of your organization—meaningless

CZ

San Francisco

FLAK board c/o Rochelle Martin

Dear FLAK Board of Directors,

It is outrageous that Tim Nichols would be expelled from your organization for his political views. It is immoral to victimize someone on the basis of their beliefs or/and views. This is an obvious point, but apparently many of you need to be reminded of this. Moreover, the fact that some of you who orchestrated Mr. Nichols’s removal are academicians makes his expulsion even more shocking. Academicians, of all people, should see the importance in the freedom to exchange ideas, values and perspectives, and lead in the protection of this freedom.

GG

I cannot express more strongly my opposition to FLAK’s cowardly and hypocritical expulsion of Tim Nichols for his political views. It hardly needs to be pointed out that an artistic and intellectual organization which claims to support intellectual freedom and oppose all forms of censorship which then expels a member in this manner is obviously bankrupt as a group. I would like to say that I am surprised, but unfortunately am not. Given the current deterioration of academic/artistic circles, it is not unusual that “liberal” stances quickly dissolve into reactionary responses when challenged.

AL

Artist, New York City

Dear Ms. Martin,

I am saddened and angered to have read about the expulsion of Mr. Nichols from your Board. I am not an architect but having been to Detroit can attest to having observed firsthand the most devastated urban center in this country. The abandoned and burned-out shell of what just a few decades ago was a thriving industrial city is a crime of monumental proportions.

How did such a social catastrophe occur? To explore, discuss, and ultimately answer this question is the prerequisite for any meaningful and successful rebuilding of Detroit. The expulsion of Nichols and the suppression of any meaningful discussion on this critical issue will further serve to impose the perspective and the

“agenda” of those forces and interests who are responsible for this ongoing social tragedy.

Sincerely,

AG

Los Angeles

I am writing to inquire if it is true that you have expelled a member of your organization in retaliation for his political views. If so, this would reflect badly on your organization, whose web site plainly states: “We defend intellectual freedom, oppose all forms of censorship, and offer sanctuary to all creative individuals.” It doesn’t seem that you have paused to consider the implications of this statement. In practice, people are often “free to believe what they want” so long as it does not conflict with what others want them to believe. In the blink of an eye otherwise earnest people find themselves advancing an Orwellian position. I hope that you will reconsider either your actions or your website. In light of the current political climate, this issue is no trifle.

RG

To: The FLAK Board c/o Rochelle Martin

I am dismayed that the board of FLAK, an organisation ostensibly created to “defend intellectual freedom, oppose all forms of censorship and offer sanctuary to all creative individuals” has, in violation of its founding principles and own bylaws, expelled Tim Nichols for voicing opinions which did not meet with the approval of certain board members.

The FLAK board is clearly attempting to censor and suppress certain ideas and opinions. Whilst FLAK’s mission statement outlines lofty ideals, one can assume that these mean nothing to most board members. While it is not required that everyone agree with the opinions expressed by Mr. Nichols, he has an inalienable right to voice them without fear of censorship, no matter how displeasing they might be to certain individuals.

The behaviour of the FLAK board, and in particular its president and vice president, has been utterly foul and reeks of hypocrisy. Rather than offering sanctuary to creative individuals, it seems more intent on forcing such people into the straitjacket of conformity. If you want FLAK reduced to a bunch of craven lickspittles, then you seem to be following the correct procedure.

I thus call upon members of the FLAK board to uphold their founding principles and the organisation’s bylaws, and to rescind the expulsion of Tim Nichols.

Yours sincerely,

EG



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact