

Capitulation to Zionist censors

Play on Rachel Corrie canceled by New York theater group

Peter Daniels
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The cancellation of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, the play about the American student killed by an Israeli bulldozer in March 2003, is a brazen act of censorship and outrageous cowardice on the part of the New York Theatre Workshop, the Off-Broadway group that had originally scheduled it.

Rachel Corrie, an activist with the International Solidarity Movement, died when she attempted to act as a “human shield” and prevent the Israeli authorities from demolishing the home of a Palestinian family. The home demolitions were connected to the construction of Israel’s apartheid-style wall that is being erected to further consolidate its occupation.

My Name Is Rachel Corrie is a solo show that uses a script based on the journals and e-mail correspondence of the American student in the months before she was killed. The script was produced by the noted British actor Alan Rickman and journalist Katharine Viner. The play, directed by Rickman, was staged at London’s Royal Court Theater last year to great acclaim. Only a month ago, it was awarded three Theatregoers Choice Awards in London—Best New Play, Best Solo Performance and Best Director.

What a London audience was able to see without any difficulty, however, will not be allowed in New York City, the US theatrical capital and a cultural mecca for the entire world. James Nicola, artistic director of the NY Theater Workshop, issued a cringing and dishonest statement attempting to justify the play’s “postponement.”

The New York group lamely claimed that its plans for *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* were only tentative. Viner pointed out, however, in an article in the British *Guardian* newspaper, that flights had been booked, the

production schedule delivered, the press announcement drafted and tickets already advertised on the Internet. Rickman denounced the action. “[C]alling this production ‘postponed’ does not disguise the fact that it has been cancelled,” said the writer and director of the piece.

According to Nicola, he polled local Jewish religious and community leaders in New York, and “the uniform answer we got was that the fantasy that we could present the work of this writer simply as a work of art without appearing to take a position was just that, a fantasy.”

Thrashing about for further justification, Nicola pointed to the recent victory of Hamas in the elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as the condition of the comatose Ariel Sharon. These developments had made “this community very defensive and very edgy, and that seemed reasonable to me,” said Nicola.

It is likely that Nicola’s “polling” only took place after pressure was brought to bear, including quite possibly by some wealthy patrons of the Theatre Workshop itself. In any case, it wasn’t a cross section of New York theatergoers or even New York’s Jewish population that Nicola consulted, but the Zionist lobby, which regularly arrogates to itself the right to decide what will be heard on the airwaves or performed in public.

The idea that the “community” is “edgy” because of Hamas’s victory or Sharon’s stroke is a preposterous excuse for censorship. When will the Zionists not be edgy, one wonders? The whole purpose of Rachel Corrie’s struggle and sacrifice, as embodied in this play, was to speak out in defense of the basic rights of

the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. To argue that the present situation makes the production of the play untimely is in fact an indirect way of saying that the play itself makes the defenders of the occupation uncomfortable. As far as the Zionist lobby is concerned, there will never be a “right” time to present it.

As Katharine Viner puts it in the *Guardian* on March 1, “anyone who sees the play, or reads it, realizes that this is no piece of alienating agitprop.” She relates instances of Israeli and American Jews who saw it in London and were profoundly moved by it, against their expectations. The Zionist censors aren’t concerned about agitprop, of course. It is precisely because the story of Rachel Corrie—in her own words—so mercilessly exposes the nature of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, that the spokesmen and apologists for the Israeli regime cannot abide its presentation.

Rachel Corrie was deliberately murdered in order to intimidate the activists who were exposing Israeli terror in the occupied territories. This murder took place days before the launching of the invasion of Iraq, where the same methods were applied to the Iraqi people, including tens of thousands of civilians killed, Iraqi prisoners brutalized and tortured in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, and Iraqi and foreign journalists brutally murdered by US forces in a conscious effort to silence those who sought to simply tell the truth about the war and occupation.

The silencing of this play is an insult to the memory of Rachel Corrie, and is bound up with a whole series of attacks on democratic rights, including attacks on the right to demonstrate, attacks on Muslim and other immigrants, government wiretapping and the imminent extension of the repressive Patriot Act. The blatant censorship of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* should provoke denunciations by artists and theater professionals in particular, as well as all defenders of democratic rights.



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