

New York theatre to present Rachel Corrie play

Sandy English
12 July 2006

Beginning on October 15, the Minetta Lane Theatre in New York City's Greenwich Village will present *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, a play about the young American civil rights activist Rachel Corrie who was murdered in Gaza by the Israeli Defense Forces in March 2003 as she sought to protect the home of a Palestinian family from destruction.

My Name is Rachel Corrie was written by the well-known British actor Alan Rickman and *Guardian Weekend Magazine* editor Katharine Viner. It is a solo show whose script is based entirely on Rachel Corrie's journals and emails. The show was directed by Rickman and played at London's Royal Court Theater. It received three prestigious awards from Theatergoers' Choice Awards and was nominated for an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement.

The play was scheduled to be performed at the New York Theater Workshop when its artistic director, James Nicola, cancelled the show in February, asserting that emotions over the play's theme were running too high. He claimed that the decision was taken in response to a "polling" of local Jewish religious and community leaders, which had found them to be "defensive and edgy."

Who exactly he consulted is not clear, but it is plain that he was reacting to powerful pressure from the Zionist lobby in New York. In a cowardly fashion, Nicola claimed that the play had only been postponed and that its production had been "tentative"—after flights had been booked and tickets advertised!

The cancellation caused a storm of protest, including from playwrights Harold Pinter, winner of last year's Nobel Prize for Literature, and Tony Kushner, whose *Homebody/Kabul* had been performed at the New York Theatre Workshop. Actor Vanessa Redgrave called the cancellation "blacklisting a dead girl and her diaries."

Katharine Viner, in a comment in the *Guardian*, noted

the disturbing antidemocratic implications of the censorship: "If a young, middle-class, scrupulously fair-minded, and dead, American woman, whose superb writing about her job as a mental health worker, ex-boyfriends, troublesome parents, struggle to find out who she wanted to be, and how she found that by traveling to Gaza and discovering the shocking conditions under which the Palestinians live—if a voice like this cannot be heard on a New York stage, what hope is there for anyone else? The non-American, the non-white, the non-dead, the oppressed?"

In London, the play was moved to the Playhouse Theatre for a nine-week engagement that ended in May. A number of American theaters offered to show it, including the Seattle Repertory Theatre. In March the play was performed in Brooklyn's Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, once a stop on the Underground Railroad before the Civil War.

Pam Pariseau and Dena Hammerstein of James Hammerstein Productions have now brought the play to New York City, together with Minetta Lane Theater, taking a principled stand for artistic freedom in the decision to bring it to the stage in America's theater capital.

The producers, friends of Alan Rickman, have avoided criticizing Nicola and the New York Theater Workshop, saying that they were motivated by the artistic merit of the play.

The play, however, is deeply political, and bound to raise the ire of those who sought to prevent its performance in the first place, particularly under conditions in which the recent invasion of Gaza has brought the brutality of the Israeli government's policy towards the Palestinians into the spotlight once again.

Rachel Corrie was a 23-year-old student at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. From an early age she detested violence and oppression, as the play shows,

and as an adult she joined the International Solidarity Movement, an organization that conducts nonviolent protest against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the war crimes that the Israeli Defense Forces prosecute.

She was crushed by an IDF bulldozer, while standing in plain view of the driver and wearing an orange jacket. She had placed herself in front of the vehicle in an attempt to prevent the demolition of a house in Rafeh. The house and 600 others were being demolished as a part of the construction of Israel's infamous "Apartheid Wall" in which whole Palestinian communities are being shut off from the world by a massive wall crowned with towers from which the IDF can monitor a subject population.

The wall near Rafeh stretches along Gaza's border with Egypt. To give snipers greater range, all the houses within 70-100 meters of the wall were demolished.

Rachel Corrie died on March 16, 2003, as she was trying to save the home of Dr. Samir Nasrallah. Like countless other Palestinians whose homes have been destroyed, he had not engaged in hostile activities against Israel. His house was demolished without compensation and without the right of appeal in court.

The murder of Corrie was a part of a deliberate escalation of violence by the Israeli Defense Forces against American and European protesters in the occupied territories. In April 2002, Australian ISM volunteer Kate Edwards suffered severe internal injuries because of IDF fire. In April 2003 British citizen Tom Hurndall was shot and critically wounded by an IDF sniper, dying of his injuries some 9 months later. Also in April 2003, a 23-year-old American, Brian Avery, was grievously wounded in the face by the IDF in Jenin on the West Bank while trying to lead Palestinian children to safety. In May of that year, British filmmaker James Miller was killed by an Israeli bullet from less than 200 feet away while carrying a white flag and identifying himself as a British journalist.

My Name is Rachel Corrie is also to be published as a 64-page book in September by TCG Publishing.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact