

Anti-Zionist Organizers Attack Critics in Rutgers Protest Aftermath

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Never Again for Anyone, the national speaking tour that honors International Holocaust Remembrance Day by equating the modern state of Israel to Nazi Germany, is now responding to criticism of its event at Rutgers University this weekend. In a controversy that has captured widespread Internet attention, event organizers turned away hundreds of protesters who, so far, have been accused of nothing more than attending.

Several points stand out in Never Again for Anyone's version of events that simply don't add up:

Was the event free or was it not? The Facebook page for the event clearly listed it as free and open to the public. The press release by Never Again for Anyone claims "Endorsing student organizations had initially publicized the admission fee as 'suggested.' This was based on an assumption that the program would be a student event with minimal costs. The university subsequently changed the event's status since the national sponsors were outside organizations." Those national sponsors happened to be listed on the same Facebook page that listed the event as "free."

But in the very next paragraph, the press release states, "The \$5 admission was made mandatory only after expenses escalated in the face of organized disruption publicized by Zionist organizations..." Which was it? Was the fee introduced before the event because of its bureaucratic status, or was the fee introduced as a response to the protest? Additionally, how could the "escalating" cost of the event be estimated *during the event itself*, accurately enough that organizers made the decision to start charging when people were already showing up, and the preparatory costs had already been incurred?

According to several witnesses at the event, signs advertising free admission were torn down by organizers, *after* the protesters showed up. Additionally, a security guard unaffiliated with the event's sponsoring student group, BAKA, is recorded on video stating that the event is open to the public; she doesn't mention a fee barrier when a protester asks if he can sit in on the event, she simply requests that he do so respectfully.

"We came straight from Havdallah [the end of the Sabbath], and hardly any of us had money," one Orthodox Jewish student told the Jerusalem Post. Orthodox Jews cannot carry money on the Sabbath; other (notoriously broke) college students probably didn't think they'd have to bring money to a free event. In this context, the sudden and previously unannounced decision to charge admission is as effective a strategy of closing the event as if they had explicitly told protesters not to come.

What was the "disruption"? The Never Again for Anyone press release on the event claims, "Students and others at the scene reported numerous anti-Muslim and other racist slurs directed against them, and Rutgers police noted that they had never before witnessed such disruption." While slurs and profanity are a grave disappointment, they are also protected speech. And video from throughout the event, including the video linked above, shows nothing more than a standing group of students and adults. No violence is in evidence; in fact, given Never Again for Anyone's need to defend its actions, specific incidents of violence surely would have been mentioned in their press release had they occurred on an organized scale. At times the hot-blooded students shout at event organizers, but they are conspicuously quiet and respectful in the videos in which security guards give them instructions. Absolutely no physical melee appears in any of the videos, and even among the less tasteful remarks flung by enthusiastic students, no threats of violence are overheard; just the obvious shock and anger of peaceful protesters who are told the rules of the game have been changed halfway through.

Of course, this also depends on the definition of "disruption." If "disruption" means the attendance of an organized and informed group of pro-Israel students and adults (as opposed to a few tokens)—if "disruption" means "disagreement," "dissent," and "debate,"

then yes, there was quite a disruption that night: while precise numbers are probably impossible to obtain by this point, by all accounts from both sides of the story the pro-Israel demonstrators outnumbered the anti-Zionist attendees by at least four to one. That much disapproval tends to make one uncomfortable; it's no wonder Never Again for Anyone is squirming.

Where is the "distortion" in the media? Never Again for Anyone's press release links to several blog posts and online news articles, cautioning readers that they are "distorted articles about the events." One in particular stands out, however. It's a short article on The Jewish Exponent, two days *before* the event, on new funding for upcoming Jewish- and Israel-related events at Rutgers. The article is actually extraordinarily dry to anyone except those with a particularly keen interest in Rutgers bureaucracy, and it doesn't even mention Never Again for Anyone until the last two paragraphs:

"[Rutgers Hillel's executive director Andrew] Getraer is concerned about another event to be held on Jan. 29 on the Douglass Campus, sponsored by American Muslims for Palestine, the International Anti-Zionist Jewish Network, and the Middle East Children's Alliance. The program, Never Again for Anyone, is being held in conjunction with the United Nations International Day of Holocaust Remembrance.

'They will have speakers who will equate Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the Holocaust and genocide, which is morally outrageous,' said Getraer. 'It not only trivializes the victims of a true genocide, the Holocaust, but it defames the Jewish State of Israel and the Jewish people.'

Let's examine the purported "distortion" here. The first paragraph states nothing more than the information provided on the event's Facebook page and the Never Again for Anyone website; in fact, it could practically have been copied off them. And even Getraer's claim that "They will have speakers who will equate Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the Holocaust and genocide" is nothing more than the message explicitly promoted by Never Again for Anyone on their website, which refers to "the on-going ethnic cleansing of Palestine." The remainder of Getraer's quote, while opinion, is rationally and civilly expressed; in addition, it is presented in the article as Getraer's personal opinion, not the opinion of the reporter or the publication. If quoting a person with an opinion constitutes "distortion," there'd be no credible news source worth reading anywhere.

But Never Again for Anyone goes further; it takes the offensive. In a press release otherwise posturing as a dispassionate account of facts, the writers go out of their way to target and demonize one Rutgers student in particular: "The protest was organized by campus Hillel and publicized by Pamela Geller, a prominent anti-Muslim and anti-Arab opponent of the Park51 Islamic Cultural Center in Lower Manhattan." It is beneath the writers for Never Again for Anyone to explain how Geller's opinion on the Ground Zero Mosque is relevant to her role in the protest at Rutgers, or how it substantiates their claims that the protest was a physical threat to the speakers; nor do the writers bother to otherwise explain or defend the vicious charge of bigotry they have attached to this young woman and active leader on her campus.

Never Again for Anyone is a national speaking tour. It will be visiting several more cities in the U.S. and Canada this week, including DePaul University in Chicago this Friday. Students: organize, educate yourselves, attend peacefully, and see how you'll be treated. Right to Exist this week will continue to expose the bigoted organizations that back this speaking tour, and arm you with the information you need to speak out.

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