

LGBT COMMUNITY CONDEMNS SPONSOR INTERFERENCE IN PRIDE TORONTO

Threats to funding follow pressure from Israel lobbyists

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TORONTO – Prominent activists from Toronto's lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities joined together to condemn moves by some sponsors of the city's annual Pride festival to dictate who will be allowed to participate in the Pride parade.

“We don't need corporate sponsors, government funders, or external lobby groups telling our community what we can talk about in our own parade,” says **Tim McCaskell**, an organiser of the protests against bathhouse raids which sparked the creation of Pride Toronto in 1981.

An April 18, 2010 feature story in the *Toronto Star* revealed that City of Toronto staff warned Pride Toronto to ban activist group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) from the parade or face repercussions to its city funding. Earlier this month, a leaked e-mail from TD Bank Financial Group revealed that the premier corporate sponsor was requesting a meeting with the Pride Toronto board of directors to discuss the inclusion of QuAIA in the parade.

“Our community has successfully resisted censorship for decades, and we aren't going to stop now,” says **Anna Willats**, a former Honoured Dyke of Pride Toronto. “City bureaucrats and corporate sponsors have no business attaching strings to their financial support that would take the politics out of Pride.”

City of Toronto staff claim that the participation of QuAIA in last year's parade violated the city's anti-discrimination guidelines. This conclusion was reached without any public process. No charges have been laid, and no complaints made to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. The decision was made by bureaucrats behind closed doors, based on false information propagated by pro-Israel lobbyist Martin Gladstone, and city staff admitted that they had not conducted a full investigation.

“The City of Toronto is saying that criticizing the Israeli government is a violation of their anti-discrimination guidelines,” says **Ayden Scheim**, a Jewish queer/trans activist. “Invoking human rights to suppress political speech is offensive to those of us who actually care about legitimate human rights issues.”

“In the 1980s, I marched in the Pride parade as part of a queer group organized against South African apartheid,” says queer filmmaker **Richard Fung**. “Why should queer activists expressing solidarity on international human rights issues be censored from Pride today?”

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For more information or to arrange an interview, please email quaia.toronto@gmail.com