

← Back (/search?text=Students%20renew%20protests%20over%20anti-Palestinian%20ads%20at%20MSU&content_added=&date_from=&date_to=&pub%252525255B0%25252525D=MLCP&pub%2525255B0%2525255D=MLCP&pub%25255B0%25255D=MLCP&pub%255B0%255D=MLCP&pub%5B0%5D=MLCP)

Students renew protests over anti-Palestinian ads at MSU

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Students renew protests over anti-Palestinian ads at MSU

By DANIEL STURM

Michigan State University's student daily, The State News, is under fire again for running a series of advertisements that protesters say promoted hatred and racism against Palestinians.

A coalition of five student groups distributed fliers and e-mails on campus this week encouraging MSU students to ask for a refund of their \$5 State News tax. As of Tuesday afternoon, 50 people had sought refunds, a coalition spokesperson said. State News officials declined to comment.

Last spring The State News published a series of 10 advertisements, paid by the organization campustruth.org, that portrayed Israelis as the victims of Palestinian aggression. One ad published on March 10, for example, illustrated an Israeli woman lighting a candle, with a caption below reading, "September 11, 2001 Israelis mourned in Tel Aviv." Next to this is a picture showing three men holding semi-automatic weapons, with a caption reading, "September 11, 2001 Palestinians celebrated in Lebanon." The ad is framed by a red headline at the bottom, stating: "There are two sides to every story, but only one truth."

When confronted about the ads by roughly 40 students on March 10, editor-in-chief Kevin Hardy said the ads didn't violate advertising policies because they did not address any race, "so a reasonable person will see that these groups don't represent how all Arabs feel and how all Jews feel." Hardy refused to apologize or stop the advertising campaign but did attend the Students for Peace and Justice meeting at MSU's Baker Hall, and at the local mosque, to explain his position.

After postponing publication for more than a month, The State News ran the remaining five ads during the week before spring finals.

In an column published April 18, Hardy defended his decision by citing freedom of speech. Hardy argued that during the refrain from printing, they had seen no signs that the ads "could incite violence in our community."

Neil Sardana, a member of Students for Peace and Justice, commented: "I think it's ridiculous to put some piece of hate out there, and then see how people react. Why would you let the piece get out in the first place? It's disgusting!"

Sardana said there were several hateful messages toward Palestinian people on campus following the

campustruth.org campaign, including graffiti on Wells Hall reading, "No future to Palestine" and "Exile for Arafat." Sardana criticized The State News for having done nothing to improve the situation, although student groups gave them the entire summer to apologize or to accept their suggestion to dedicate equal space to an advertisement that depicted Palestinians and Arabs fairly.

Responding to the criticism, The State News staff is now considering the addition of "national origin" to the anti-discrimination clause of their advertising policy, Hardy said. The State News Board of Directors hasn't approved any such changes yet, but has scheduled the proposal to be revisited at the next board meeting, Sept. 26, in room 191 of the MSU Communication and Arts Building.

Hardy said that changing the policy wasn't necessary. "We opened up more dialogue and discussed our advertising policy with the public, but we fully felt that these ads should be in the paper," he said. He added that The State News also offered the protest coalition editorial space in its March 10 edition.

When asked how he felt about the groups' campaign asking students to withdraw from paying their \$5 newspaper tax, Hardy said: "They exercise every right as an American to protest, and I fully support their right."

Rehab Abdel-Kariem, a member of Students for Palestinian Human Rights, said that changing the bylaws would do nothing to rectify the situation. She said the existing clause already included race and ethnicity, and that "this action fails to address the damage done by the 10 racist advertisements that have reached a community of 43,000 people 10 times."

Referring to ads the coalition has created to protest the anti-Palestinian ads, Sardana said: "The only thing that will stop us from protesting is if they post our ads and print an apology."

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