

The “Reasonable Accommodation” Commission and Debate: Statement by No One Is Illegal–Montreal

[The No One Is Illegal–Montreal collective is publishing and distributing the following statement in opposition to the racist “reasonable accommodation” debate in Quebec, and the related Bouchard–Taylor Commission. We encourage groups and individuals who agree with this statement to endorse it by contacting noii-montreal@resist.ca. We also encourage allies who would like to help organize against the hearings, or support the organizing of No One Is Illegal, to get in touch as well.]

November 12, 2007

The “reasonable accommodation” debate in Quebec, and the related “Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences” (the so-called “Bouchard–Taylor Commission”), are fundamentally rooted in xenophobia, racism and sexism.

From the outset, the “debate” fails to recognize that Quebec and Canada are built on stolen Indigenous land, and constituted through the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples who have been forced into “accommodating” colonization. Moreover, it completely ignores the fact that racism and white supremacy were intrinsically tied to the creation of both Canada and Quebec, and throughout their histories, have been instrumental in defining who “belongs” and who does not.

The Bouchard–Taylor Commission was created in the context of xenophobia during an election campaign and has provided an uncontested platform for racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Opportunistic politicians and corporate media have appealed to public fears and prejudices, and manipulated false controversies over religious practices and cultural differences to create a generalized hysteria, with little to no basis in fact. In its very framework it creates a binary of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’; the ‘us’ being made up of white people of European descent, and the ‘them’ being whichever non-white immigrant group is currently under the spotlight.

The supposed "debate" has made open bigotry publicly acceptable, using simplistic caricatures that render our communities homogenous, uncontested and monolithic. While we reject this offensive portrayal of our communities, we assert the diversity of our cultures and traditions as well as our multiple identities.

Insidiously, so-called progressives and feminists have used the Commission platform to promote their own sophisticated brand of racism, one that refuses to acknowledge the oppressions within Western society, and unquestioningly considers Quebec to be "pluralistic, democratic and egalitarian".

While using rhetoric rooted in Islamophobia and sexism to justify war abroad, as is the case in the on-going military occupation of Afghanistan, Quebec has embraced the framework around the "rights of women" and the systematic dehumanization of Muslim cultures to justify intolerance chez nous. We reject the notion that women of faith need to be saved from their inherently oppressive and backward cultures, and instead we support the women who are on the frontlines of their own struggles for liberation, and subjects, not objects or victims, of their own transformation.

As the Bouchard-Taylor Commission begins its public hearings in Montreal, we are organizing to openly and publicly reject the commission process and framework. To engage the Commission process is to validate its fundamentally racist premise, which is to stand judgment of immigrant communities. This Commission, sanctioned by the state, is a process of submission, whereby minority populations are forced to justify their very existence in Quebec. The way this debate is framed ignores all the current intolerance and injustice faced by many migrant communities in Quebec, while forcing them to defend themselves as "good Quebecois".

We declare: Ni patrie, ni état; ni Québec, ni Canada! We refuse to submit to any form of nationalism.

Instead, we organize by uncompromisingly putting forward a vision of social justice, rooted in day-to-day grassroots struggles. We acknowledge and support the self-determination and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples all over the Americas -- struggles that have

once again been rendered invisible in the skewed “reasonable accommodation” debate.

We organize actively against poverty, precarity, racial profiling, police brutality, war, capitalism and gender oppression. We organize against borders, for free movement and status for all. We actively fight against state oppression and violence targeted at the most marginalized, while struggling against all forms of oppression, whatever their source.

In contrast to the faulty framework of “reasonable accommodation”, we assert “solidarity across borders”, in the spirit of mutual aid and support.

We call for a collective rejection of the entire Commission. The process of genuine dialogue and debate, and real pluralism, comes from our shared struggles against all forms of oppression. The “reasonable accommodation” debate has clouded and confused the unity and solidarity we share -- as workers, poor, women, queer and trans people, migrants, and others -- fighting together to achieve real justice.

We re-assert those struggles, by refusing the fundamentally racist and sexist premises of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, and by refusing to be submissive or fearful as we continue to practice self-determination and strive for collective liberation.

-- No One Is Illegal-Montreal (November 2007)
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