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AIPAC dirty laundry aired as former staffer sues for defamation

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The U.S. Jewish community has been scandalized by details of an increasingly dirty lawsuit, brought by a former AIPAC staffer who was dismissed after he was charged with attempting to spy for Israel.

Steven Rosen was sacked by the America Israel Public Affairs Committee in 2004 after he and fellow staffer Keith Weissman were charged with espionage and passing sensitive information to Israeli diplomats and journalists. The charges against the two, however, were dropped before the case reached a courtroom.

The FBI claimed that it had enough evidence for convictions, but all the charges were dropped nonetheless. The controversial case made headlines again in March 2009 after Rosen filed a civil suit in a Washington, D.C. court against his former employers for defamation.

In his suit, Rosen demanded damages of \$21 million for comments by AIPAC officials, which Rosen claims they knew to be lies, while criminally disregarding the damage it would do to his reputation.

AIPAC submitted a detailed declaration in court at the beginning of November, requesting the dismissal of Rosen's lawsuit. The document included transcripts of conversation between Rosen and his lawyer and other AIPAC senior officials, intending to prove that the organization had legitimate reasons to fire him.

The AIPAC declaration included recorded statements made by Rosen to a Washington Post reporter in which he says that he does not want to 'run into trouble' ? a phrase that AIPAC claims proves that Rosen knew that he was doing something wrong.

Later in the conversation, Rosen expresses relief that the United States does not have a law on the books similar to the British law of 'national secrets,' according to which journalists can be tried for publishing classified information.

"The significance of this is that the plaintiff knew that the information he passed to the journalist was classified, otherwise there would be no need to mention the law," the AIPAC deposition read. The organization spent \$4.9 million on Rosen's trial. The deposition mentioned that although the case never came to trial, Rosen was never exonerated.

A large part of the deposition relates to Rosen's 'inappropriate behavior,' claiming that he experimented with sexual liaisons with other married men on Craig's List and used his AIPAC office computer to surf pornographic websites.

The deposition also claimed that pornographic files were found on Rosen's computer, a clear violation of AIPAC policy. Additionally, the deposition notes, criminal charges are not something that AIPAC expects from its employees.

For his part, Rosen sees himself as a victim and scapegoat that AIPAC knowingly put at risk with untrue accusations and by ignoring the facts. Rosen rejects AIPAC's accusations that his actions should not be considered to be work done for the organization, claiming that they are considered to be normal behavior for the lobby.

In reponse to a request from haaretz, AIPAC issued the following statement:

?As is demonstrated in detail in the pleadings that AIPAC has filed, this is a frivolous lawsuit with no merit. AIPAC has made it clear during the course of this litigation that it disagrees with Mr. Rosen's characterization of events relevant to the litigation.

"As the pleadings demonstrate, it is AIPAC's position that Steve Rosen's claims are wildly inaccurate, are undermined by Rosen's own admissions under oath in his deposition, and constitute a blatant attempt to detract attention from the true and relevant facts. We have filed a motion for summary judgment in this case with the court and look forward to resolving these matters in that venue.?"

At the time of publciation, Rosen had not replied to Haaretz's request for comment.

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