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the almost unseemly haste with which Bhutto's husband and son were given immediate control upon her death.

Democracy was meant to be the antithesis of feudalism. Popular sovereignty was to supplant divine right; free elections to supplant dynastic succession (a progression Americans have not completely mastered either). It is clear that Bilawal meant to put the best gloss on his mother's dictum. He, like she, would avenge the political murder of a parent not with violence but through the ballot box. Nonetheless, his unmistakable assumption of aristocratic entitlement clangs against his professed fealty to democratic means.

His mother was the same. In more

## Society practising democratic forms

society to a Leninist dictatorship. How many decades will it take before we acknowledge that the axiom that economic liberalization leads to political liberalization may not be axiomatic?

These defeats, marking the cresting of the 30-year democratic wave that had swept through Latin America, Eastern Europe, East Asia and even parts of Africa, raise more than theoretical questions. They challenge George W. Bush's core notion that American foreign policy should be predicated on trying to spread democracy. Six years after 9/11 there still is no

be abandoned because his fall would unleash the deluge.

These are hard days for democracy. That is not a reason for giving up on it. It is a reason for the prudent acceptance and nurturing of local variants, however imperfect.

The Roman Church learned that spreading the creed required tolerance for the incorporation of certain pre-Christian practices as a way of strengthening the new faith and giving it local roots. For the spread of democracy today, we need to practise our own brand of syncretism and learn not to abandon the field when forced to settle for regional adaptations that fall short of the Jeffersonian ideal.

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# It's a human right to be an idiot



GEORGE JONAS

on grounds you consider idiotic," he said. "What's your beef?"

"I've news for you," I said. "Human rights commissions aren't protecting human rights. They're protecting human ambitions *against* human rights."

"You lost me," he said.

"Alas," I replied, "you're not the only one."

On this question I lost most opinion-makers and policy-entrepreneurs 30 years ago, although the latest events involving the *Western Standard* and *Macleans* magazine may help recapture some. A few public intellectuals finally professed a little unease when the HRCs they helped create began venturing into areas of ostensibly fundamental freedoms. "During the years when my colleagues and I were labouring to create such commissions," wrote the Canadian Civil Liberties Association's Alan Borovoy after an HRC called the *Western Standard* on the carpet for reprinting some cartoons of the

prophet Muhammad, "we never imagined that they might ultimately be used against freedom of speech."

Unlike many civil libertarians, I feared HRCs might do just that back in the 1970s for two reasons. One, they threatened to do it; two,

**A Jew who won't hire a Muslim is a fool. The worse fool is the 'human rights' czar who forces him to**

it seemed to me HRCs were founded on a false premise.

Human rights laws and tribunals are based on the notion that being hired, promoted, serviced and esteemed is a human right. It isn't. Being hired, promoted, serviced and esteemed is a hu-

man ambition. It's a justifiable ambition, but still just an ambition.

A human right is to be sovereign in one's legitimate sphere. A human right is to select whom to hire, promote, service or esteem. It's to decide with whom to associate. It's to have an opinion, silly as it may be. It's a human right to be an idiot.

To illustrate: A Canadian Jew who won't hire a Canadian German or Muslim is a fool. There's only one fool worse: a "human rights" commissar who would force him.

Where individuals exercise lawful choices, human rights are protected. People's motives are their own business. Most people aren't morons. When left to their own devices in a free society, most will select whom to hire, promote, service or esteem on the basis of enlightened self-interest, not prejudice.

There are attractive ambitions and ugly rights, but the ugliest right still trumps the prettiest ambition. When one protects a human ambition, no matter how noble, against a human right, no matter how ignoble, one enters the wasteland of social engineering, the barren realm of statism. At

best, it's the tyranny of good intentions. While a tyranny of good intentions is better than a tyranny of evil intentions, it's still tyranny. Soon all intentions vanish, and only the tyranny endures.

Freedom is indivisible. Questioning HRCs only after they shift their aim from areas in which intellectuals have little emotional investment, such as business, to areas in which they have much, such as public discourse, is too late. So is raising one's voice when HRCs go after all-time champions like Mark Steyn, having kept mum when they singled out also-rans like the late Doug Collins.

Some argue that lapsed liberals who kept quiet while the state's commissars were targeting marginal journalists in fringe periodicals have zero moral authority to speak when they go after major commentators in mainstream magazines. Nonsense. Relapsed liberals are welcome to speak. "So foul a sky clears not without a storm," as Shakespeare had it. Hauling a leading newsmagazine before an HRC tribunal may create the storm that sweeps away these ludicrous kangaroo courts.

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An acquaintance had a question for me. "Didn't you write something to the effect once that anyone who wouldn't hire, promote or rent an apartment to a person because of his or her race, religion, ethnicity or gender was a fool?"

"Close enough," I replied. "I think I actually used the word 'idiot.'"

"Then why are you railing against human rights commissions?" he asked. "You share their values?"

"Gosh, I hope not," I said.

"HRCs were set up to protect human rights against discrimination

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