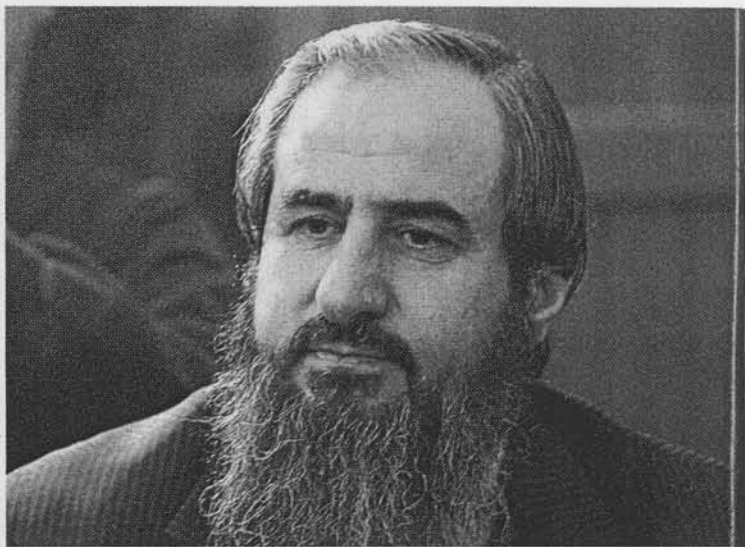


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DENMARK'S Queen Margrethe II (left); Mullah Krekar, who said the number of Muslims in Europe 'is expanding like mosquitoes'

Here's what offends this writer

Why should free-born Canadians require the permission of the state to read my columns?

BY MARK STEYN

"The lights are going out on liberal society," began Melanie Phillips in the *British Spectator* the other day. And, reading on, I was a little embarrassed to discover not only that the particular liberal society being plunged into darkness was Canada but that the latest bulb to be extinguished was, ahem, yours truly.

Do you remember a cover story *Maclean's* ran on Oct. 23, 2006?

No? Me neither, and I wrote it. Such is life in the weekly mag biz. But it was an excerpt on various geopolitical and demographic trends from my then brand new tome, *America Alone: The End of the World as we Know It*. I don't know whether my bestselling book is still available in Canadian bookstores, but it's coming soon to a Canadian "courtroom" near you! The Canadian Islamic Congress and a handful of Osgoode Hall law students have complained about the article in *Maclean's* to (at last count) three of Canada's many "human rights" commissions, two of which have agreed to hear the "case." It would be nice to report that the third sent the plaintiffs away with a flea in their ears saying that in a free society it's no business of the state to regulate the content of privately owned magazines. Alas, I gather it's only bureaucratic torpor that has temporarily delayed the province of Ontario's enthusiastic leap upon the bandwagon. These students are not cited in the offending article. Canadian Muslims are not the subject of the piece. Indeed, Canada is not mentioned at all, except en passant. Yet Canada's "human rights" commissions have accepted the premise of the Canadian Islamic Congress—that the article potentially breaches

these students' "human rights."

Since the CIC launched its complaint, I've been asked by various correspondents what my defence is. My defence is I shouldn't have to have a defence. The "plaintiffs" are not complaining that the article is false, or libellous, or seditious, for all of which there would be appropriate legal remedy. Their complaint is essentially emotional: it "offended" them. And as offensiveness is in the eye of the offended, there's not a lot I can do about that.

But, given that the most fundamental "human right" in modern Canada is apparently the right not to be offended, perhaps I could be permitted to say what offends me. I'm offended by the federal and British Columbia human rights commissions' presumption that the editing decisions of *Maclean's* fall within their jurisdiction. Or to put it another way, I don't accept that free-born Canadian citizens require the permission of the Canadian state to read my columns. The eminent Q.C. who heads the Canadian Human Rights Commission may well be a shrewd and insightful person but I don't believe her view of *Maclean's* cover stories should carry any more weight than that of Mrs. Mabel Scroggins of 47 Strathcona Gardens. And it is slightly unnerving to me that large numbers of Canadians apparently think there's nothing wrong in subjecting the contents of political magazines to "judicial review."

Let's take it as read that I am, as claimed, "offensive." That's the point. It's offensive speech that requires legal protection. As a general rule, Barney the Dinosaur singing "Sharing is Caring" can rub along just fine. Take, for example, two prominent figures from Scandinavia. Extremely prominent, as it happens. In his Christmas address to the

Swedish people, King Carl Gustaf hailed the dawn of "one new Sweden. Young people with roots in other cultures put Sweden on the map in musical styles, in the field of sports, with business ideas that were not there when I was younger... To welcome changes and to let the mix of cultures and experiences enrich our lives and our society is the only road ahead." Blah blah blah. Usual multiculti bromides. Could have been our own Queen's Christmas message or her vicereine on Canada Day. Stick it in the *Globe and Mail* and no one would bat an eyelid.

By contrast, here's another Scandinavian head of state. Two years ago, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, musing on Islamic radicalism in her own country, said that people need occasionally to "show their opposition to Islam... It is a challenge we have to take seriously. We have let this issue float about for too long because we are tolerant and very lazy. And when we are tolerant, we must know whether it is because of convenience or conviction."

Can you still print the Queen of Denmark's remarks in a Canadian publication? To be honest, I'm not sure. If you examine Dr. Mohamed Elmasry's formal complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Commission about my article, Grievance #16 objects to the following assertion:

"The number of Muslims in Europe is expanding like 'mosquitoes.'"

That claim certainly appears in my piece. But they're the words not of a notorious right-wing Islamophobic columnist but of a big-shot Scandinavian Muslim:

"We're the ones who will change you,' the Norwegian imam Mullah Krekar told the Oslo newspaper *Dagbladet* in 2006. 'Just look at the development within Europe, where the number of Muslims is expanding like mosquitoes. Every Western woman in the

EU is producing an average of 1.4 children. Every Muslim woman in the same countries is producing 3.5 children.”

Given that the “mosquitoes” line is part of the basis on which the HRC accepted Dr. Elmasry’s complaint of “Islamophobia,” I’m interested to know what precisely is the offence? Are Mullah Krekar’s words themselves Islamophobic? Or do they only become so when I quote them? The complainants want a world in which a Norwegian imam can make statements in a Norwegian newspaper but if a Canadian columnist reprints them in a Canadian publication it’s a “hate crime.” It’s striking to examine the Canadian Islamic Congress’s complaints and see how many of their objections are to facts, statistics, quotations—not to their accuracy but merely to the quoting thereof. But, of course, they’ve picked the correct forum: before the human rights commissions, truth is no defence.

Just for the record, my book is not about Islam, not really. Rather, it posits Islam as an opportunist beneficiary of Western self-

I DON'T KNOW IF MY BESTSELLING BOOK IS STILL IN CANADIAN BOOKSTORES, BUT IT'S COMING SOON TO A 'COURTOOM' NEAR YOU!

enfeeblement. The most important quotation in the entire text is nothing to do with Muslims or mosquitoes but a bald statement by the late historian Arnold Toynbee:

“Civilizations die from suicide, not murder.”

One manifestation of that suicidal urge is the human rights commission. It is an illiberal notion harnessed in the cause, supposedly, of liberalism: gays don’t like uptight Christians flaunting the more robust passages of Leviticus? Don’t worry about it. We’ll set up a body that’ll hunt down Bible-quoting losers in basements and ensure they’ll trouble you no further. Just a few recalcitrant knuckle-draggers who decline to get with the beat. Don’t give ’em a thought. Nothing to see here, folks.

The Canadian Islamic Congress is now using this pseudo-judicial shortcut to circumscribe debate on one of the great central questions of the age: the demographic transformation of much of the Western world. The Islamification of Europe is a fact. It’s happening. It’s under way right now. Are Canadian magazines allowed to acknowledge that? And, if they do, are they allowed to posit various scenarios as to how it might all shake out? The CIC objects to articles that suggest all Muslims are jihadists and radicals. Very well. Are we permitted to try and calibrate what proportion is radical? For example, a recent poll found that 36 per cent of Muslims between the ages of 16 and 24 believe that those who

convert to another religion should be punished by death. That’s not 36 per cent of young Muslims in Waziristan or Yemen or Sudan, but 36 per cent in the United Kingdom. Forty per cent of British Muslims would like to live under sharia, in Britain. Twenty per cent have sympathy for the July 7 Tube bombers. And, given that Islam is the principal source of population growth in every city down the spine of England from Manchester to Sheffield to Birmingham to London, these statistics are not without significance for Britain’s future. Can we talk about it?

Not if the CIC and their enablers at the human rights commissions get their way. I note, too, that the Ontario Federation of Labour is supporting the Canadian Islamic Congress’s case. As Terry Downey, executive supremo of the OFL, primly explains, “There is proper conduct that everyone has to follow”—and his union clearly feels my article is way beyond the bounds of that “proper conduct.” Don’t ask me why. I don’t pretend to understand the peculiar psychological impulses that would lead the OFL to throw its lot in with Dr. Mohamed Elmasry and the CIC. Except that there seems to be some

kinky kind of competition on the Western left to be, metaphorically speaking, Islam’s lead prison bitch.

Oh, dear. Is that “offensive” to the executive committee of the OFL? Very probably so. I may well have another “human rights” suit on my hands. Heigh-ho. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

Or we could all grow up and recognize the dangers in forcing more and more public discourse into the shadows. As David Warren put it, the punishment is not the verdict, but the process—the months of time-consuming distractions and legal bills that make it easier for editors to shrug, “You know, maybe we don’t need a report on creeping sharia, after all. How about we do The Lindsay Lohan Guide To Celebrity Carjacking one more time?” Canada is not unique in the urge of its *bien pensants* to pre-emptive surrender: Australian publishers decline books on certain, ah, sensitive subjects; a French novelist was dragged into court to answer for the “Islamophobia” of one of his fictional characters; British editors insist books are vacuumed of anything likely to attract the eye of wealthy Saudis adept at using the English legal system to silence their critics.

Nonetheless, even in this craven environment, Canada’s “human rights commissions” are uniquely inimical to the marketplace of ideas. In its 30 years of existence, no complaint brought to the federal HRC under

Section XIII has been settled in favour of the defendant. A court where the rulings only go one way is the very definition of a show trial. These institutions should be a source of shame to Canadians.

So I’m not interested in the verdict—except insofar as an acquittal would be more likely to legitimize the human rights commissions’ attempt to regulate political speech, and thus contribute to the shrivelling of liberty in Canada. I’m interested only in getting the HRCs out of this business entirely. When it comes to free speech on one of the critical issues of the age, to reprise Sir Edward Grey on the eve of the Great War, the lamps are going out all over the world—one distributor, one publisher, one novelist, one cartoonist, one TV host at a time. M

**MACLEAN'S
BESTSELLERS**

COMPILED BY BRIAN BETHUNE

Fiction

- 1 **LATE NIGHTS ON AIR** 1 (13)
by Elizabeth Hay
- 2 **A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS** 2 (27)
by Khaled Hosseini
- 3 **DIVISADERO** 4 (33)
by Michael Ondaatje
- 4 **THE PENGUIN BOOK OF CANADIAN SHORT STORIES** (1)
ed. by Jane Urquhart
- 5 **THE ASSASSIN'S SONG** 7 (16)
by M.G. Vassanji
- 6 **WORLD WITHOUT END** 6 (10)
by Ken Follett
- 7 **THE UNCOMMON READER** 5 (3)
by Alan Bennett
- 8 **THE FROZEN THAMES** 3 (6)
by Helen Humphreys
- 9 **THE GHOST** by Robert Harris 9 (2)
- 10 **CONFESSOR** by Terry Goodkind 8 (3)

Non-fiction

- 1 **MUSICOPHILIA** by Oliver Sacks 1 (9)
- 2 **THE SHOCK DOCTRINE** 2 (15)
by Naomi Klein
- 3 **THE AGE OF TURBULENCE** 10 (13)
by Alan Greenspan
- 4 **I AM AMERICA (AND SO CAN YOU!)** 3 (10)
by Stephen Colbert
- 5 **THE LETTERS OF NOEL COWARD** 4 (3)
ed. by Barry Day
- 6 **CLAPTON** by Eric Clapton 5 (10)
- 7 **THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE WAR ON CANCER** 8 (2)
by Devra Davis
- 8 **BORN STANDING UP** 7 (2)
by Steve Martin
- 9 **A SECULAR AGE** by Charles Taylor (1)
- 10 **A LIFE OF PICASSO: THE TRIUMPHANT YEARS, 1917-1932** 9 (5)
by John Richardson

LAST WEEK (WEEKS ON LIST)