

Alberta's gauntlet of bias



LORNE GUNTER

Ezra Levant is a courageous man. On Friday, he flipped the bird at the Alberta Human Rights Commission. The AHRC, and the rest of the country's human rights witch hunts, have long needed the bird flipped at them.

Ezra is a long-time friend of mine and a former employee of this paper. That does not alter the fact that he is a courageous man.

Two winters ago, when Muslims around the world were rioting in the streets, killing one another by the score and destroying hundreds of millions in property, over cartoons of Muhammad that appeared in a Danish newspaper, Ezra was almost alone in Canada in summoning the courage to show his readers what the fuss was about.

At the time, Ezra was publisher of the newsmagazine *Western Standard*, now sadly defunct. He (rightly) felt civilized readers could be trusted to see the cartoons and make up their own minds whether they were offensive or not.

To the Western eye, the depictions were tame. Much worse is drawn of our own politicians every day.

And the notion that publications in the Western world could staunch the violence on the Muslim street half a world away by not reprinting the cartoons, was ludicrous, even if most politically correct talking heads nodded knowingly at the suggestion that reprinting them would make matters worse.

So Ezra decided to take advantage of the ancient Anglo-Saxon right to free

expression and published the cartoons.

What he was reminded of, almost immediately, is that Canada is no longer an Anglo-Saxon nation. Gone is the robust belief held by our ancestors for 800 years that the citizen is sovereign, that he is free to do as he wishes unless the state can show unambiguously that there is an overriding need to limit his liberty temporarily. It has been replaced by the continental notion that nothing is allowed unless it is expressly permitted by the state. The belief that the citizen owes the government an explanation of his actions, not the other way around, has gripped our politicians, bureaucrats, judges and professors.

Ironically, human rights commissions are the best examples of just how many rights we have lost. They follow none of the rules of evidence built up

“Human rights commissions are the best examples of just how many rights we have lost”

over centuries to assure the accused of a fair hearing. Many commissions will hear plaintiff's testimony in secret, violating the protection of being able to confront one's accusers. Most admit hearsay and limit the right of the accused to counsel or to call his own witnesses and experts.

Whether they will admit it or not, most also employ reverse onus: Before them, the accused is presumed guilty of racism, sexism, homophobia or general insensitivity if someone from a favoured minority claims to have been offended. It is the responsibility of the accused to prove he is not.

Unlike in a defamation court, at a human rights show trial truth is no defence. What's more, the accuser will be represented by the tax-funded officers of the commission, sometimes even by government-paid lawyers, while the defendant will have to pay his own way.

Ezra strode into this gauntlet of bias and hyper political correctness on Friday, knowing the deck was stacked against him. Even in Alberta, the human rights commission — which has the power of a federal court — is more interested in soothing the hurt feelings of vocal interest groups than preserving free speech. Even in Alberta, it is, as Voltaire wrote, “dangerous to be right when the government is wrong.”

An Alberta human rights officer questioned Ezra on Friday (you can see the entire 90-minute meeting at www.ezralevant.com or on YouTube). She said at one point “you're entitled to your opinions, that's for sure,” to which Ezra replied he clearly was not entitled to them, otherwise he wouldn't be being subjected to her “interrogation.”

In his powerful opening remarks, Ezra said that publishing the cartoons in the face of elite criticism “was the proudest moment of my public life. I would do it again today.” Indeed, he did it again Friday, posting the drawings on his Web site.

He made it clear, too, he was appearing under protest because he believes “the commission has no proper authority” to limit free speech. He refused to refer to the commission as a “human rights” commission, since “the government agency [is] violating my human rights” and destroying the intended meaning of the words “human rights.”

“But,” he concluded, “I will use this joke of a forum ... to tell the country about the moral and legal bankruptcy of these commissions.”

Hear, hear.

National Post
lgunter@shaw.ca

LETTERS

the week, with many readers rising to the doctrine's defence.

“So Damon Linker states that ‘the rise of the new atheists is cause for

prevented helpful commentary.”

Sai D'Angelo was much more passionate in expressing his disgust with the idea of having some news-

Re: Jan
Lai
dep
by s
onl
law
jori
ity
Can
som
they
G.D.

Re: A
Terer
Whil
Terer
to so-
argur
if he
-nan
Th
betwe
(CO₂)
sands