

which was driving the van at the time of the accident.

The city's high school opened its doors, as early as 4 a.m. on Saturday, to students and parents in need of familiar surroundings, to provide the support of family, friends and

the carrying the blame. Even since the accident, and hopefully for the next few days, the emphasis is rightly being placed on comforting those in grief and trying to come to grips with such an overwhelming tragedy.

government to collaborate with any foreign government that claims to be fighting "terrorism," no matter how questionable that government's human rights record might be, should set off alarm bells for all Canadians (Jan. 10 story).

According to an earlier report (Jan. 4), a federal government brief, recently submitted to the investigation by a Supreme Court justice into the cases of three men who say flawed information from Canadian intelligence services led to their being tortured, states: "The fact that a particular country may have a poor human rights record is not sufficient, without other compelling circumstances, to preclude the sharing of information."

This statement is profoundly disturbing to anyone concerned about the international reputa-

tion have forgotten is that whenever Canada shares "information" with such countries, it may be putting innocent people, Canadians travelling abroad, at risk. There have been too many instances where such information turns out to be false.

Co-operating with such regimes will also compromise Canada's ability to press internationally for better protection of the rights of people imprisoned simply for their dissenting opinions.

That ill-defined objective, "fighting terrorism," must not become a justification for the indiscriminate wrecking of human lives in the name of security.

Canada must unequivocally support due process and stand against the legitimizing of torture.

Anthony Harding, Wolfville

hoped-for benefits of tidal power raises a serious concern. This development is to be a joint public-private initiative which will include a research component to examine the "environmental, technical and commercial feasibility of harnessing the Bay of Fundy tides." The public interest surely demands that the evaluation of the environmental impacts of tidal power be undertaken by scientists who can conduct their research independent from government, as well as from the power companies involved.

There is no way that such research, if it were funded wholly or in part by the partners in this undertaking, could provide Nova Scotians with the assurances they need that tidal power can be implemented without serious harm to the ecology of the Bay of Fundy.

Scott Burbidge, Port Williams

points in between.
Dale Wilson, Cow Bay

Lays it on the line

I want to thank The Chronicle Herald, and writers Dr. John Ross and Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed for their Jan. 10 opinion article "Good times not found in a bottle." This article lays it right on the line regarding what happens when people drink to excess, and is a welcome addition to our thoughts at this time of year.

I don't think for even a moment that the article will provoke any change in the drinking habits of anyone, but it at least caught my attention with its directness and honesty. It "calls a spade a spade," something that I, for one, always appreciate.

Harold Rowe, East Ferry, Digby Neck

LETTERS

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Protect us from human rights commissions

WATCH OUT for the thought police, better known as Canada's human rights commissions.

Saying or publishing material that "offends" somebody – even if it does not remotely meet the legal standard of libel/slander or hate speech – can still land you in front of one of these government-created tribunals, forced to defend yourself, at your expense, in a legal twilight zone where normal judicial rules of evidence don't apply.

Think I'm being alarmist? Two cases before Canadian human rights commissions right now should be triggering flashing red lights and alarm bells from Signal Hill to Vancouver Island.

Two years ago, media outlets around the world agonized over whether to publish the controversial Danish cartoons, a dozen images depicting the



PAUL SCHNEIDERREIT

Islamic prophet Muhammad. The Danish daily that first published the cartoons, you recall, did so as an explicit test of freedom of expression. After their publication sparked riots, primarily by Muslims, in European and Islamic countries, including a number of deaths and property damage, North American media outlets weighed the images' value as an essential part of a news story, with worries that republication might set off more violent protests.

Many outlets chose not to republish the cartoons. But others did. One of the few

media outlets in Canada to do so was The Western Standard, then published by Ezra Levant.

Freedom to criticize even religion has a long tradition in the West (just think of the urine-covered crucifix held up as "art" some years back), as does editorial cartooning, which regularly, and at times viciously, lampoons public figures and causes. Though controversial, the cartoons broke no laws (in fact, by editorial cartooning standards, most were benign). Levant was criticized by some, lauded by others. His decision sparked debate – which, after all, is the point, isn't it?

No matter. Syed Soharwardy, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada, complained to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Chillingly, it agreed to hear the case, meaning that, though Levant broke no law, his Charter-guaranteed right to freedom of speech was, according to the Alberta body,

apparently conditional. Levant, appearing in protest last week before what he called a "kangaroo court," videotaped his meeting with the AHRC bureaucrat questioning him. The session is on YouTube. Check out the first segment at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzVJTHIvqw8.

The other case where Big Brother, in the form of our human "rights" commissions, has now decided to sit in judgment on the boundaries of freedom of speech, concerns columnist Mark Steyn, Maclean's magazine and the Canadian Islamic Congress.

Last October, Maclean's published an excerpt from Steyn's new book, *America Alone*. In that work, Steyn argues demographics foretell the collapse of the West and rise of Islam. Below-replacement birth rates in many Western countries, including Canada, says Steyn, and high fertility rates among Muslims, in-

creases the danger Islamic fundamentalism will overpower Western countries in future.

Now, you're free to agree or disagree with Steyn, but no one is saying – and certainly no law enforcement agency has indicated it thinks – that there is anything illegal about Steyn's book. There's nothing libellous about it, it isn't hate speech and it breaks no other Criminal Code restrictions. Yes, it's controversial and much debated, but again, isn't that the point?

Not according to four law students at Osgoode Hall, who filed complaints, backed by the Canadian Islamic Congress, with the federal, B.C. and Ontario human rights commissions, alleging Steyn and Maclean's were promoting ill will towards Muslims. Again, in a measure of just how far these commissions believe their jurisdiction over what we say goes, the federal and B.C. bodies have indicated they'll hear

the case.

The implications are enormous. Based on the actions of human rights commissions in this country, anyone who feels slighted by what they read or hear is free to go to one of these august bodies and complain. The threshold is not whether any law was broken – such complaints would never make it inside a real courtroom – but whether the complainant's "right" not to be offended – by, to be sure, sometimes edgy material – was transgressed.

There is no cost to the complainant, for if a commission takes a case, its lawyers act on its behalf at state expense. No such luck for those who've had the temerity to say something controversial. If they want a lawyer, it's on their dime.

Human rights bodies need to be reined in, hard and soon, and told to stop trampling on one of the most basic rights of all – free speech.

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