

Dear Western Standard reader,

Our magazine has been sued for publishing the Danish cartoons, and I need your help to fight back.

As you know, the Western Standard was the only mainstream media organ in Canada to publish the Danish cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Mohammed.

We did so for a simple reason: the cartoons were the central fact in one of the largest news stories of the year, and we're a news magazine. We publish the facts and we let our readers make up their minds.

Advertisers stood with us. Readers loved the fact that we treated them like grown-ups. And we earned the respect of many other journalists in Canada who envied our independence. In fact, according to a COMPAS poll last month, fully 70% of Canada's working journalists supported our decision to publish the cartoons.

But not Syed Soharwardy, a radical Calgary Muslim imam.

He asked the police to arrest me for publishing the cartoons. They calmly explained to him that's not what police in Canada do.

So then he went to a far less liberal institution than the police: the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Unlike the Calgary Police Service, they didn't have the common sense to show him the door.

Earlier this month, I received a copy of Soharwardy's rambling, hand-scrawled complaint. It is truly an embarrassing document. He briefly complains that we published the Danish cartoons. But the bulk of his complaint is that we dared to try to justify it - that we dared to disagree with him.

Think about that: In Soharwardy's view, not only should the Canadian media be banned from publishing the cartoons, but we should be banned from defending our right to publish them. Perhaps the Charter of Rights that guarantees our freedom of the press should be banned, too.

Soharwardy's complaint goes further than just the cartoons. It refers to two news articles we published about Hamas, a group labelled a terrorist organization by the Canadian government. By including those other articles, he shows his real agenda: censoring any criticism of Muslim terrorists.

Perhaps the most embarrassing thing about Sohwardy's complaint is that he claims our cartoons caused him to receive hate mail. Indeed, his complaint includes a few e-mails from strangers to him. Some of those e-mails even go so far as to call him "humourless" and tell him to "lighten up". Perhaps that's hateful. But all of those e-mails were sent to him before our magazine even published the cartoons. Sohwardy isn't even pretending that this is a legitimate complaint. He's not even trying to hide that this is a nuisance suit.

Sohwardy's complaint should have been thrown out immediately by the Alberta Human Rights Commission, just like the police did. But it wasn't. Which is why I'm writing to you today.

According to our lawyers, we will win this case. It's an infantile complaint, without basis in facts or law. Frankly, it's an embarrassment to the government of Alberta that their tribunal is open to abuse like this.

Our lawyers tell us we're going to win. But not before we have to spend hundreds of hours and up to \$75,000 fighting this thing, at our own expense. Sohwardy doesn't have to spend a dime - now that his complaint has been filed, Alberta tax dollars will pay for the prosecution of his complaint. We have to pay for this on our own.

Look, \$75,000 isn't going to bankrupt us. But it will sting. We're a small, independent magazine, not a huge company with deep pockets. All of our money is needed to produce the best possible editorial product, not to fight legal battles. This is clearly an abuse of process designed to punish us and deter other media from daring to cross that angry imam in the future.

One of the leaders in Canadian human rights law, Alan Borovoy, was so disturbed by Soharwardy's abuse of the human rights commission that he wrote a public letter about it in the Calgary Herald on March 16th. "During the years when my colleagues and I were labouring to create such commissions, we never imagined that they might ultimately be used against freedom of speech," wrote Borovoy, who is general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Censorship was "hardly the role we had envisioned for human rights commissions. There should be no question of the right to publish the impugned cartoons," he wrote.

Borovoy went even further - he said that the human rights laws should be changed to avoid this sort of abuse in the future. "It would be best, therefore, to change the provisions of the Human Rights Act to remove any such ambiguities of interpretation," he wrote. That's an amazing statement, coming from one of the fathers of the Canadian human rights movement.

I agree with Borovoy: the law should be changed to stop future abuses. But those changes will come too late for us - we're already under attack. The human rights laws, designed as a shield, are being used against us as a sword.

We will file our legal response to Soharwardy's shakedown this week. And we will fight this battle to the end - not just for our own sake, but to defend freedom of the press for all Canadians.

Do you believe that's important? If so, I'd ask you to help us defray our costs. We're accepting donations through our website. It's fast, easy and secure. Just click on <http://www.westernstandard.ca/freedom>

You can donate any amount from \$10 to \$10,000. Please help the Western Standard today - and protect freedom for all Canadians for years to come.

Yours gratefully,

Ezra Levant  
Publisher

P.S. Remember, Soharwardy's complaint will be prosecuted using tax dollars and government lawyers. We have to rely on our own funds - and the generous support of readers like you.

P.P.S. Please help us now, at  
<http://www.westernstandard.ca/freedom>