

Free speech is a Jew's best friend

By Ezra Levant

There was gleeful clucking across the land when Alberta's attorney general decided to appeal Jim Keegstra's hate-trial acquittal. The talking heads at the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) took turns telling the media how eager they were for yet another hearing – the third since the pitiful racist from Eckville was first arrested a decade ago.

Although I despise Keegstra and his anti-Semitic views, I am much more upset by the CJC's vengeful enthusiasm. In fact, Keegstra hardly even worries me now: it's been more than a decade since he was fired as a school teacher and tossed out as Eckville's mayor. Now he's just a two-bit auto mechanic in a two-bit town. No, what really worries me – and what I think should worry every Jew – is the larger social fallout that comes from censoring uncomfortable

Let's also remember that Weimar Germany had laws against hateful speech too – in fact, more than one hundred Nazis were tried before Hitler came to power. Not only did these laws not damage the nascent Nazi movement, but they actually helped to foster it. Under the law, any third-rate racist could have a forum – a public forum at that, and the right to be heard out to the last anti-Semitic detail. No, these laws didn't hurt the Nazi birth. These laws were the midwife.

Hate laws act as debate-chilling censorship and also as a last-ditch publicity campaign for racists. But the effect of hate speech laws on political citizenship is the most serious problem of all.

Anti-hate legislation is breeding a generation of po-

ideas and hateful speech. The courts – with the CJC's glowing approval – are setting some dangerous precedents. And just as sure as day follows night, when government rolls back freedom, Jews lose.

The most obvious loss to Jews is the loss of freedom of expression. Throughout the ages, Jews have been on the vanguard of uncomfortable speech, from the political far left to the far right. Our vigorous, disconcerting style was not limited to politics however; Jews upset the apple cart in scientific and artistic fields too. Today, radicals like artist Eli Langer, abortionist Henry Morgentaler and lawyer William Kunstler still cause many to wince. That's okay; we Jews carry with us a spirit best expressed by another Jewish radical. When asked what his Jewish heritage meant to him, he replied that it taught him that even if the entire world told him he was wrong, he knew he could

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litically lazy and gullible Canadians. By entrusting outside of the political debate to the government, we are abandoning an important part of what it means to be citizens.

We don't have to be vigilant now, because our friend government is there to think for us. We don't have to challenge anti-Semites, we don't have to educate people about the Holocaust, we don't have to stand up anymore and we don't have to fight. Our historical friend, government, will do it for us.

When the government's on guard, we don't have to be. But this isn't just an Orwellian prediction, this is the thinking on college campuses today. I can see it right now.

Just last year our university campus paper was bombarded with anti-Israel and anti-Se-

mic letters to the editor. For weeks the letters ran with no rebuttal from any of the 200 Jewish students (or faculty) on campus. In the end only one other student and I wrote a response.

Why the silence? "I didn't want to make any trouble," one Jewish student told me. "I didn't know what to say," replied another. "I thought someone else would take care of it," answered a third. We are creating a generation of whimpering wards of the state.

If any Jew thinks that the government will be there to stand up to the hate-mongers when it really counts, I wish them well, but I know better. Instead of teaching Jewish students how to debate and how to write letters to the editor and how to organize rallies, we are teaching them to run to

still be right. That radical was Sigmund Freud.

Even the slightest censorship can and must strike at Jews, for Jews are always at the centre of controversial thought. Some Jews might hope that hate-speech laws will be applied precisely enough to censor only anti-Semites. Let us not be so naive. History has given us a simple political equation: the more repressive a government, the more Jews will die. It's that basic. And the consummate practitioners of political correctness and compliance – the Nazis and the Soviets – showed us the extreme conclusion of this censorship.

Today we grin as Keegstra squirms for us. Savour that feeling while it lasts; we may be on trial next.

That's because the central pillar of law is the concept of precedent. Judges must look to past verdicts to guide future decisions. So if we acceded to a politically restrictive law

simply because today it happens to handicap our opponents, we will be advantaged only temporarily. For the precedent will have been set and it will wait for us like a trap. One day it will be us who is gagged by the censor.

Perhaps we've forgotten how important free speech – and outrageous speech – is as a tenet of Judaism. That would be a shame. But Canada's hate laws offend secular political sensibilities too. The obvious, though unintended, result of prosecuting racists is that these inconsequential bigots are granted a legitimacy and publicity that they could only dream of achieving on their own. Because of his trials, thousands of people have been exposed to Keegstra. Newspapers, television and radio talk shows – all have provided a forum for an eccentric crank who would otherwise be marginalized in our liberal democracy.

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their political nanny. No fire for the truth, no passion for argument – those Jewish traits are gone.

And maybe, in the end, that's the real reason I'm against hate speech laws. I'm still willing to take on the racists. I want to prove them wrong. I want to out-talk them, out-mobilize them, out-manoeuvre them and out-educate them. I want to defeat them one student at a time and one voter at a time. It's hard work, but fulfilling work. And it's part of the price we pay for being Jews. And I pity any Jew so tired of that fight that he would violate every Jewish precept in the name of political expediency.

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