

EZRA LEVANT: THE ONLY PERSON IN THE WORLD TO FACE LEGAL SANCTION FOR REPRINTING DANISH CARTOONS OF MOHAMMED

“What I underwent was [essentially] the first prosecution of blasphemy laws in Canada in over eighty years” says Levant

By RHONDA SPIVAK

Ezra Levant, publisher of the now defunct *Western Standard* magazine, says he was investigated in a highly “shocking” case by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, after he “made an editorial decision” to reprint Danish cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Mohammed “to illustrate a news story.”

Levant, a dynamic, fast-talking Calgarian lawyer, whose mother Leslie Meloff and father Marvin Levant grew up in Winnipeg, was interviewed by *The Jewish Post & News* when in Winnipeg May 8.

Levant said a few of the Danish cartoons were “bland” and others were “critical of radical Islam.” One showed Mohammed in heaven saying “Stop, stop, we ran out of virgins” - which was a poke at the promise of “72 celestial virgins offered by radical Muslims in their terrorist recruitment efforts.”

Originally, the 12 cartoons published in 2005 didn’t make international news.

“They became a big deal when a group of Danish imams went on a world tour to drum up Muslim anger against Denmark. The imams added in three additional cartoons that were made up. These three new [fake] cartoons - which hadn’t been published anywhere before, and were the imams’ own handiwork - included one showing Mohammed having sex with a dog, and another of Mohammed with a pig face.

“Syria and Iran got involved and used these cartoons to whip up



Ezra Levant, lawyer, journalist, and political activist. “I was investigated for 900 days. It was a fatwa being prosecuted by a secular human rights commission.” Photo by Rhonda Spivak.

riots...and deflect attention from their own problems. Syria was facing a UN investigation of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, and Iran’s plan to develop nuclear weapons was beginning to marginalize it diplomatically... Over 100 people were killed by **cartoon violence**,” said Levant.

“It was the biggest news story in the world, but one thing was missing - the pictures,” added Levant, whose magazine became “the only media outlet in the country to print the cartoons.”

CBC and others didn’t print them out of ‘respect’ for Islam, which Levant said was “self-censorship.”

“We printed them [the cartoons] not as our opinion. We showed them as a prosecutor would show an exhibit to the jury... our readers wanted to see what all the fuss was about...We got letters of support [for this decision] from some Muslims who said they came to this country to be free... Irshad Manji wrote in a letter of support,” said Levant.

After Levant published the cartoons, a Calgary imam, Syad Soharwardy, a Pakistani immigrant to Canada, went to the police and demanded they arrest Levant. “The police had to explain to him that... police in Canada don’t enforce the Koran,” Levant explained.

But then Soharwardy filed a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission [AHRCC].

“He [Soharwardy] cited verses from the Koran in his complaint. I was investigated for 900 days. It was a *fatwa* being prosecuted by a secular human rights commission. My legal fees were \$100,000. They lost. I won, but not really - I’m out \$100,000. I didn’t get my costs.

“The Imam who went after me is a public advocate of Sha’aria law. He managed to get what was [in essence] the first prosecution of blasphemy (Cont. on page 3. See “Ezra Levant”.)

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Community news **Ezra Levant** (Cont. from page 1.)

laws in this country in over 80 years," said Levant.

"They [the AHRCC] offered me a deal. I had to pay \$2000 and give the imam one page in my magazine to let him write [what he wanted]," added Levant, who said that the complaint against him never ought to have amounted to an investigation.

Levant said that in 2007, *Maclean's* magazine was hauled before three Human Rights commissions for its discussion of radical Islam [for publishing an excerpt from Mark Steyn's book *America Alone*]. They demanded six pages of *MacLean's* [in a proposed deal]."

Levant said he was able to raise donations "over the internet from people around the world" to fight back against the AHRCC.

"Not even the Danish cartoonists themselves had been hauled in to answer for what they'd done, [nor any of the newspapers throughout Europe who had republished the cartoons]," said Levant, who has written about this in his new book, *Shake Down*.

Levant, whose blog, ezrelevant.com was voted Best Canadian Blog in the 2008 Weblog Awards, said that the investigation against him shows Canadian legal processes "have been hijacked by radical Islam."

"There are two ways [for radical Islam] to take on a magazine that's critical of it. The first way is to blow up the magazine and the second way is to use our Western legal system against us," said Levant, who added that in his view the procedures of human rights commissions are "awful."

"They allow hearsay evidence...They took documents and my hard drive without having a search warrant..." he said.

In a 2008 submission to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, B'nai Brith Canada's senior legal counsel, David Matas noted that s. 22(1) of the Alberta Human Rights legislation gave the commission the power "to dismiss at any time a complaint it considers without merit."

After pointing out that the "Soharwardy complaint sat on the books for 2 years," Matas wrote that "A complaint without merit should be dismissed a lot more quickly than that."

When asked about his views of Shahina Siddiqui's complaint against B'nai Brith Canada investigated by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, Levant said that B'nai Brith was also put through an ordeal by "a kangaroo court."

According to Levant, because of cases against him, *MacLean's*, and B'nai Brith, "There is bipartisan support to reform human rights commissions."

Human Rights Commissions and Hate Speech: B'nai Brith's and Levant's Diverging Views

Although both B'nai Brith Canada and Ezra Levant have complaints against the workings of human rights commissions, they have very divergent views of what ought to be done to remedy the situation.

Levant believes that human rights commissions and hate tribunals ought to be dismantled altogether, and **there ought to be no regulation of hate speech by human rights commissions or by the criminal law.**

Regarding Holocaust denial, Levant said:

If someone is denying the Holocaust, we have to stand up and debate them. If someone is spewing hatred, we have to rebut them, but I'm against any government censorship of their speech. At least we know who the haters are...I want freedom of speech for the right and the left...Countries that censor speech have more violence because people can't vent. Look at Saudi Arabia. Freedom of speech is a great safety valve..."

Levant said that David Ahenakew, in his view, ought not have been prosecuted for his hate speech.

"You think I'm not offended by Ahenakew ...But nobody but his grandchildren would have been interested in listening to him..., Now he's a national celebrity...The answer is to stand up and debate him..." Levant added.

According to Levant, "Censorship never works out well for Jews...Jewish organizations think that these laws of censorship will only be used to protect them, but they'll also be used against them ..." he emphasized.

"The irony is [these] very hate laws are now being used against the Jews by the likes of the Canadian Islamic Congress... Jews should never have endorsed "hate speech" laws. It's not only un-Jewish, but it's set a precedent that is being used against the Jews (like me) and non-Jewish Zionists (like Mark Steyn)," Levant wrote to *The Jewish Post & News* in an email.

Unlike Levant, B'nai Brith Canada, in its 2008 submission to the Canadian Human Rights Commission has taken the position that



David Matas believes that human rights commissions "need to be educated on the threat that...political Islam poses for human rights."

"Human Rights Commissions and hate tribunals ought not to be dismantled, but their procedures need to be improved."

In the submission, Matas wrote that human rights commissions and tribunals "need to be educated on the threat that Islamism and political Islam pose for human rights."

He also wrote they need to have the power to award costs to the winning side and further, "Where a commission has assumed conduct of a case on the side of the complainant but loses at the tribunal level, the tribunal should have the power to award costs not just against the complainant but also against the commission."

Additionally, according to Matas, "...Commissions should be screening complaints in every case."


As well, B'nai Brith advocated that anonymous complaints ought not to be allowed.

However, B'nai Brith ended its submission, by concluding:

"No matter what the procedures...any jurisdiction dealing with Islamism or political Islam without any awareness of what these ideologies are or the damages they pose will not function effectively. Canadian institutions generally, and human rights commissions and tribunals in particular, need to lay in their defences against these ideologies."

The Jewish Post & News asked Matas to comment on Levant's position that hate speech ought not to be regulated by criminal law or human rights commissions at all. Matas responded by email:

"This [Levant's argument] is an argument which can be used about any law. Israel is falsely accused of genocide. So there should be no law against genocide and so on. The defence against abuse of the laws is to stop the abuse, not repeal the laws. That sort of reaction is a prescription for anarchy. It is in everyone's interest that we have a society living under the rule of law rather than living in a lawless society."




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Faith Kaplan, JFM Volunteer (R) with Debbie Brown, CEO of HSFM and HSFM staff.



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