

Barbara Kay: A lesson for schools in Surrey and Ottawa -- aggression works

Posted: February 10, 2009, 9:38 AM by Jonathan Kay

In a [story out of Surrey, England February 6th](#), an angry headteacher is suing "gutless" education honchos for 100,000 pounds because they failed to support her against Muslim school bullies. The bullies were not children in the school yard, but a group of Muslim governors, appointed in 2003, that plaintiff Erica Connor claims took control of regular board meetings and pushed for a more religious agenda, including pressure on her to link up with the local mosque in order to focus on Muslim worship. When she resisted, she was labelled "racist and Islamophobic." Rather than support her, her superiors branded her as "unresponsive to the needs of the faith community." Connor says she is so depressed at having been made a "helpless scapegoat," she may never work again.

Sadly, what seems to be a hijacking of a supposedly secular public school system by religious extremists has become a commonplace in Britain and Europe. The all too common response to the arrogance and aggression of Muslim exceptionalism in public institutions, most consequentially in schools, has been appeasement, and a disgraceful acquiescence to the kind of scapegoatism this teacher alleges.

Most Canadians probably believe that sort of thing can't happen here. And yet when I read this story, I was immediately reminded, with something of a chill, of an eerily similar narrative I had read concerning a school in our nation's capital. The details were different, but the basic problem - school officials backing down in the face of Muslim aggression against a teacher, and a subsequent acquiescence in the teacher's victimization in order to avoid confrontation with religious expansionism - were the same.

I'll call the Canadian teacher "Miriam," not her real name. A Jewish child of Holocaust survivors, Miriam taught part time at a French-language high school in Ottawa from 2001-2004, a period she describes as "the worst years of my life." The school was predominantly Muslim, the students principally from Djibouti and Eritrea.

Because Miriam was quite aware of the pervasive anti-Semitism amongst her students, she did not reveal she was Jewish. However, after her absence from school on the Jewish High Holidays, she was subject on a daily basis to overt anti-Semitic comments in the hallways, such as: "Does someone smell a Jew, does someone smell a stinking Jew?" Miriam of course complained to the principal and the vice-principal. According to Miriam, the principal said to her: "It seems that you divulged the fact that you are Jewish, so what do you expect?" It was left to Miriam to take mitigating tactics to avoid harassment.

Conversely the principal admonished staff for every perceived slight to Muslim sensibilities. Miriam says that the principal insisted staff not look students in the eye, that they not gesture with their forefinger to indicate students should approach, and refused to act against Muslim students who were physically aggressive to male teachers (the principal was a woman). During the invasion of Iraq, moments of silence were held in the classroom. Students could be excused from class during the playing of the national anthem. Cultural presentations and shows involved only Muslim culture, with no Canadian content. Students were not allowed to speak English, but they were allowed to speak their native languages.

In the spring of 2004, a 17-year old Djibouti male student issued a tirade at her in the classroom. In Miriam's recollection it went: "I don't have to listen to you - you are not a person, you are nothing, you are a Jew, you do not exist as a person." Ordering him to the office and following him down the hall, she was treated to further abuse: "Don't speak to me, don't look at me, you are not human, you are a Jew," repeated over and over. Although the student was suspended for ten days, there was no follow-up. He was not made to apologize, and there were no sensitivity sessions laid on for all the students. In a similar incident with another student who was also briefly suspended, the parents were puzzled as to what the problem was, since, they patiently explained, the teacher was Jewish. When the principal told Miriam that both students would return to her class, she said she could not work under those conditions. The School Board's decision was to put her on paid leave until the end of the school year - another two months - with the provision that she retire. As a result, Miriam had to buy back three years of pension at a personal cost of \$90,000 in order to take early retirement. A litigator told Miriam that she has an excellent case for a lawsuit. But, fearing physical retribution, she decided the emotional *sturm und drang* would not be worth it.

Perhaps you think this is all a he said-she said kind of story, and that you have only heard one side of it. Consider this then: The year Miriam left this school in the spring of 2004, a full *sixty out of seventy-five* teachers had asked for a transfer. Because of the uncomfortable atmosphere, francophone Canadian students were no longer enrolling. According to Miriam, "They had been complaining for years and parents got wise." Maybe it's time our school boards and our politicians got wise as well.

Read more: <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2009/02/10/barbara-kay-a-tale-of-two-cities-school-administrations-in-surrey-england-and-ottawa-canada-allow-schoolteachers-to-be-scapegoated-in-the-name-of-multiculturalism.aspx#ixzz0XFpYrmHy>