

Zionists witch-hunt Australia's leading cartoonist

Richard Phillips
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Zionist commentators, aided and abetted by the Murdoch media, have seized on a malicious hoax to vilify Michael Leunig, one of Australia's leading editorial cartoonists. Leunig's cartoons are published in the Fairfax-owned *Melbourne Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

While Leunig's work has long been popular for its lighthearted and whimsical qualities, over the last few years his antiwar stance and hostility towards the Howard government and the so-called "war on terror" has become increasingly pronounced. His passionate opposition to Israeli repression of the Palestinian people has also made him a hate target of the local Zionist lobby.

Last week a freelance journalist, without permission and claiming to be Leunig, sent one of the cartoonist's images from 2002 to Iran's *Hamshahri* newspaper, which is holding a cartoon competition on the Holocaust in 'retaliation' for the publication of anti-Muslim images by Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten* and other European newspapers.

The government-controlled *Hamshahri* claims that it is running the competition in order to test the boundaries of free speech—the justification given by European papers for publishing the caricatures of Mohamed. Instead of politically exposing the real character of the anti-Muslim cartoon campaign, the newspaper has chosen to whip up anti-Semitic hostility inside Iran.

Leunig's cartoon, which was accompanied by a sham email claiming that the submission was a "show of solidarity with the Muslim world," was drawn for the *Age* in May 2002. It was produced during the Israeli military's bloody assault on the Palestinian towns of Jenin and Ramallah in the West Bank, which killed scores of innocent men, women and children, and its military blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The first section of the cartoon consists of a Jewish concentration camp inmate gazing up at the Nazi slogan,

"Work brings Freedom." The second section is of an Israeli soldier in 2002 confronted with another lie, "War brings Peace."

Michael Gawenda, editor of the newspaper in 2002 and a Zionist, refused to publish the cartoon, claiming that it was "beyond the limits" required for a discussion on the Middle East. In fact, Leunig's cartoon is a powerful and entirely legitimate contribution to a discussion on Israeli policy and one that reflected the concerns of many ordinary people around the world at the time, including tens of thousands of Israeli citizens.

Last week, when Leunig discovered that his cartoon had been sent to the *Hamshahri* contest, he immediately contacted the publication and had the image removed from the Iranian newspaper's web site. He told the *Age* that he suspected the misappropriation of his work was probably an attempt to show that he "was a friend of Muslim terrorists."

While it is not clear whether this was the aim of the fraudster, who confessed to his actions last Wednesday, the Zionist lobby and the Murdoch media were not interested. Their target was Leunig.

Pro-Zionist commentators peppered the press with denunciations, claiming that Leunig's anger about the fraud was bogus and accused him of being anti-Semitic and a supporter of Islamic fundamentalists. Some letter writers demanded that the cartoonist be sacked. It didn't matter in the slightest whether a hoax had been perpetrated or not, Leunig was a public menace and nothing he said could change that, according to his detractors.

Ted Lapkin, policy director of the Australia-Israel Jewish Affairs Council and a commentator for its weekly *Review*, claimed Leunig was "playing the martyr" and was not genuinely opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. Lapkin's wife Sharon penned a comment entitled "The hateful world of Michael Leunig," in which she

maliciously accused the cartoonist of an “ongoing campaign to mock and humiliate Australian Jews.”

The Murdoch press joined the fray with its usual blend of right-wing arrogance and thuggish stupidity. It published an editorial in the Wednesday edition of the *Australian* and an Op-ed piece the next day by Piers Akerman in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*.

Headlined “Poison Pen’s Perils,” the editorial railed against Leunig and the *Age* newspaper. The rambling, almost unintelligible comment denounced the cartoonist for his 2002 cartoon and for his opposition to the provocative anti-Muslim cartoon campaign in Denmark and throughout Europe. The newspaper then vilified the *Age* for opposing the National Gallery of Victoria’s closure of an exhibition featuring Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* photograph in 1997. The *Australian* went on to conclude that the “progressive Left,” along with radical Islamists, were a “threat to free speech in the West.”

Akerman in the *Daily Telegraph* claimed Leunig was now “the artist of choice” of Iranian mullahs and that the cartoonist’s opposition to war and fascism was bogus. Akerman suggested that Leunig had no fundamental differences with Islamic fundamentalists and “doesn’t know a terrorist when he sees one.”

Michael Gawenda was given space in Thursday’s *Age* to offer his own malevolent insinuations. He alleged that the cartoonist was not concerned about *Hamshahri*’s racist campaign and had “gone out of his way to praise the Iranians.” Leunig’s anger, according to Gawenda, was “beyond belief” because in reality he was “soft” on Islamic fundamentalism.

These baseless slanders against Leunig are based on a simple technique—the crude amalgam. If you reject the so-called “war on terror” and its associated war crimes then you are with the terrorists. If you are against the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq then *ipso facto* you back Saddam Hussein. And finally, if you oppose the Israeli dispossession and repression of the Palestinian people then you must, like Michael Leunig, support Islamic suicide bombers, Muslim fundamentalism and anti-Semitism.

The purpose of the campaign is to pressure his editors into sacking Leunig, and to intimidate anyone who dares challenge Israel’s criminal policies against the Palestinian people. This follows a definite pattern that has already led to the sacking of editorial cartoonist Malcolm Evans from the *New Zealand Herald* in August 2003.

Like Leunig, Evans, one of that country’s leading cartoonists, was accused of anti-Semitism by the Zionist

lobby because he highlighted the human consequences of Israeli government policies. Evans was ordered by the newspaper’s editor to stop submitting the offending images and then sacked because he drew a cartoon equating Israeli repression in the Occupied Territories in the West Bank with apartheid.

New Zealand Herald, which is owned by the APN News & Media group, claimed that Evans had violated a company policy of not publishing religious symbols to represent governments or secular bodies. This policy, however, was ignored by one of APN’s publications in Australia earlier this month, when the *Rockhampton Morning Herald* published the anti-Islamic cartoons.

While Canberra has made no official comment on Leunig, there is no doubt that it would like the cartoonist pulled into line. One of the purposes of the wide-ranging anti-terror laws introduced by the government last year was to silence anyone challenging its “war on terror” policies.

The witch-hunt against Leunig constitutes a fundamental attack on democratic rights. The cartoonist has been a principled and consistent opponent of social inequality, fascism and war—a rare figure in the corporate controlled media.

When asked to comment recently on the anti-Muslim cartoons, he correctly characterised them as deliberate “taunts” against “an aggrieved and traumatised spiritual community who feel at the mercy of the West’s contempt, ignorance and ruthless military might.”

Explaining his attitude towards the Israeli government in a January 13 article for the *Age* he wrote: “I have a Jewish friend, a Holocaust survivor, who says that she never could have lived in Israel because in her view it is a totalitarian state.... I believe that something fundamental and vital, not just to Israel but to the entire world, has been gravely mishandled by the present Israeli administration and it bothers me deeply. It is my right to express it.”

On the war in Iraq and the responsibility of being a political cartoonist, he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio last year: “I think if a cartoonist is representing the government line on Iraq, they’re nothing better than a propagandist.”



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