

Just the Business

Should NZME keep caving to the thugs' veto?

JENNY RUTH'S JUST THE BUSINESS

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Whatever happened to “publish and be damned”?

I can't pretend my inspiration to become a journalist was that 1952 movie, *Deadline USA*, starring Humphrey Bogart as the editor of a newspaper about to be sold from under him, and who is being threatened by gangsters, but publishes anyway.

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But maybe a few of today's editors and publishers, not to mention their advertising departments, ought to watch it to get a refresher about what journalism is supposed to be about.

It should be required viewing for NZME's senior management and advertising department, because they clearly don't understand how to responsibly manage the country's largest newspaper, the New Zealand Herald, not to mention all its regional titles and the fleet of radio stations it owns.

In March 2022, when I called out in a column NZME's refusal to continue publishing a Speak up for Women (SUFU) advertisement, the editor of NZME-owned BusinessDesk refused to publish my column.

Luckily, National Business Review decided to publish it and you can read it here:

<https://www.nbr.co.nz/guest-opinion/censorship-nzme-and-transgender-issues/>.

NZME's grounds back then were that the company had received complaints when it had run the ad.

Socially responsible

Its refusal to publish was despite the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) having already rejected complaints about that same ad that had earlier appeared on a billboard.

The ASA had received 34 complaints about the billboard ad, which accused it of being transphobic hate speech which could cause undue harm or offence to the transgender community.

“In the context of advocacy advertising, the advertisement was socially responsible and did not reach the threshold to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence, did not cause fear or distress without justification, and was not misleading,” ASA said.

The ad consisted of the Oxford Dictionary definition of the word woman: adult human female.

NZME evidently regards this definition as taboo.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident.

The Free Speech Union – an organisation formed by a number of prominent people from across the political spectrum, including lawyer and former ACT MP Stephen Franks and long-time leftist commentator Chris Trotter – has revealed that NZME has refused to carry an ad from Shalom New Zealand, an organisation representing NZ-based Israelis.

NZME told Shalom NZ that it would only run the ad in its newspapers if the organisation paid extra “security fees” over and above the advertising fee.

Walks like a duck ...

Sounds like extortion to me.

Effectively, NZME was telling a victim that, if NZME ran the ad, that victim had to pay to protect NZME from the very mob that was victimising Shalom NZ and other Jewish people living in NZ.

Conditioning in this manner the granting of a voice to the victims of actual mob violence ought to stick in the craw of any journalist.

How craven, cowardly and lacking any sense of morality NZME's are actions toward both SUFW and Shalom NZ.

It's actions ought to be anathema to any citizen who thinks NZ should be a peaceful and democratic society in which free speech and the right to be heard is a given.

The NZ Police should also be up in arms – obviously, NZME has no faith in the police force's ability to keep the peace and guard private property, surely their reason to exist.

That's if you believe NZME was acting in good faith.

In good faith?

Unfortunately, we also have grounds to question the good faith of NZ Police, given the way they stood back in Auckland in March and watched the assaults of Posie Parker, the persona

of pro-women British activist Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull, and women who had come to hear her in a public park.

In the event, all anybody at the event heard was the chants, screams and shouts from the mob who were hellbent on not allowing Keen-Minshull or her followers to speak.

While her mission is often mis-portrayed as being “anti-trans” and even “Nazi sympathiser” because uninvited white nationalists have turned up to her events, I cannot see any good reason why we should not believe her actual slogan: Let Women Speak.

Co-founder and former FSU chair Jordan Williams, stepping in for FSU chief executive Jonathan Ayling who is on leave as he welcomes a new baby into his family, alerted FSU members to the situation affecting Shalom NZ.

“Putting aside the disturbing situation that NZ media outlets now fear violent retaliation by political activists, it sets a terribly dangerous precedent that the victims of political abuse must pay extra “security fees” to have their right to participate in public dialog,” Williams said.

As Williams noted, the Shalom NZ ad was no more offensive than the SUFU one was, but even so, I'd take issue that offending somebody in itself should be grounds for suppression of free speech.

The actual ad

The Shalom NZ ad expressed anguish for the about 1,400 people massacred, kidnapped, women and girls raped, and other atrocities committed by the terrorist group Hamas in Israel on Oct 7.

It also outlined the fear Jews all over the world are now living under: “While we respect the democratic right of New Zealanders to voice their support for innocent victims on both sides of the conflict, we have seen disturbing incidences of antagonism towards the Jewish community in NZ.”

Personally, I've been horrified by the nonchalant dismissal throughout the Western world of what happened, in particular, to those Israeli women and girls on Oct 7.

Women and girls with blood running down their legs were paraded in triumph through Gaza and Hamas itself proudly posted the video evidence online.

This following comment is hardly original to me, but it does look like: “me too, unless you're a Jew.”

It is thought that more than 100 people kidnapped by Hamas on Oct 7 are still being held hostage in Gaza. Many of them are some of these same women.

There can be no doubt that Hamas provoked the current conflict.

Israel's reaction in attacking Gaza is as predictable as it is horrific.

Deliberate provocation

It seems obvious to me that, given the history of Hamas and Israel's reactions to previous atrocities, that Hamas set out to deliberately provoke such a reaction from Israel.

We know Hamas has no qualms about using innocent Palestinians as human shields.

Sadly, Israel is playing right into Hamas' hands.

Because Israel can't eliminate Hamas and all it will achieve is creating the next generation of Palestinians inspired by implacable hatred of Israel after experiencing the destruction of their city and the wholesale slaughter of so many of its residents.

The FSU is giving NZME far more benefit of the doubt than it deserves: "This isn't an issue of censorship by the media, it's a case of media being censored by the mob. The fact NZME are taking the mob threats so seriously should send a cold shiver down the backs of those who want our media to be free, frank and unapologetic in tackling tough subjects," Williams said.

"NZME have said they are willing to run the advertisement so long as the NZ Herald's additional security costs are covered. Clearly, they don't trust the police to do their job."

Frankly, I don't believe NZME has been acting in good faith.

Shalom NZ's intended ad:



Dear People of Aotearoa New Zealand,

We the Israeli-expat community, are reaching out to share our perspectives and feelings during these challenging times, hoping to foster your understanding and empathy.

The barbaric October 7th Hamas terror attack where approximately 1,400 people were massacred, woman and young girls raped and countless other acts of torture towards innocent families, left many of us with continuous mental anguish. Israel is a small nation, and each one of us has a personal connection to people who are right now living held in captivity or those who were murdered in the Hamas terror attack.

We Chose Aotearoa as our home, and embraced the Kiwi way of life, contributing to our local community and the economy. We as a community are now worried that our new home is no longer safe. While we respect the democratic right of New Zealanders to voice their support for innocent victims on both sides of the conflict, we have seen disturbing incidences of antagonism towards the Jewish community in New Zealand.

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