

OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Column smacks of hypocrisy, ignorance, intolerance

Re: *Pass the Danish: media muzzled by Muslims?* Column by Bruce Annan, Feb. 19

I was disappointed by the tone and implications of Mr. Annan's article. It sheds no education or understanding of the matter regarding the global Muslim pain associated with the cartoons of Muhammad.

It smacks of hypocrisy, ignorance and intolerance.

Yes, I am a Muslim.

However, I was also raised in Canada since I was six and thus virtually all of my conditioning has been as a Canadian. I am as "Canadian" as anyone here.

The article misses some very important points that could have informed your readers of the Muslim angst over this issue, instead of creating more confusion at best and further racism at worst.

This is not an issue of free speech. As a society, we have already agreed that we do not accept unlimited "free speech".

For example, we do not question the Jewish Holocaust. We do not accept outright slander of a people by race, creed or religion. The issue is not free speech, but rather about "acceptable" speech.

Muslims view Muhammad as a great prophet, as we do Jesus Christ, Moses, Abraham and the others.

We would prefer that none of them were

made into statues or drawn because such depictions can be manipulated. How do you think non-Europeans feel when they see Jesus portrayed as fair-haired and blue-eyed, although he was from the Middle East?

It is not appropriate to have the prophets, who were such inspirations to people, be manipulated for the potential benefit of others.

Nevertheless, Muslims understand such prophets are also dear to other religions and hence we respect those other people's rights to worship as they see fit, even if we disagree.

However, Muhammad is strictly a Muslim prophet and he specifically asked that no such semblance of him be made. That should be respected.

Muhammad was a very pious and dear man. He is beloved by all Muslims as a part of the family. Thus to insult and denigrate him is highly offensive and hurtful to Muslims.

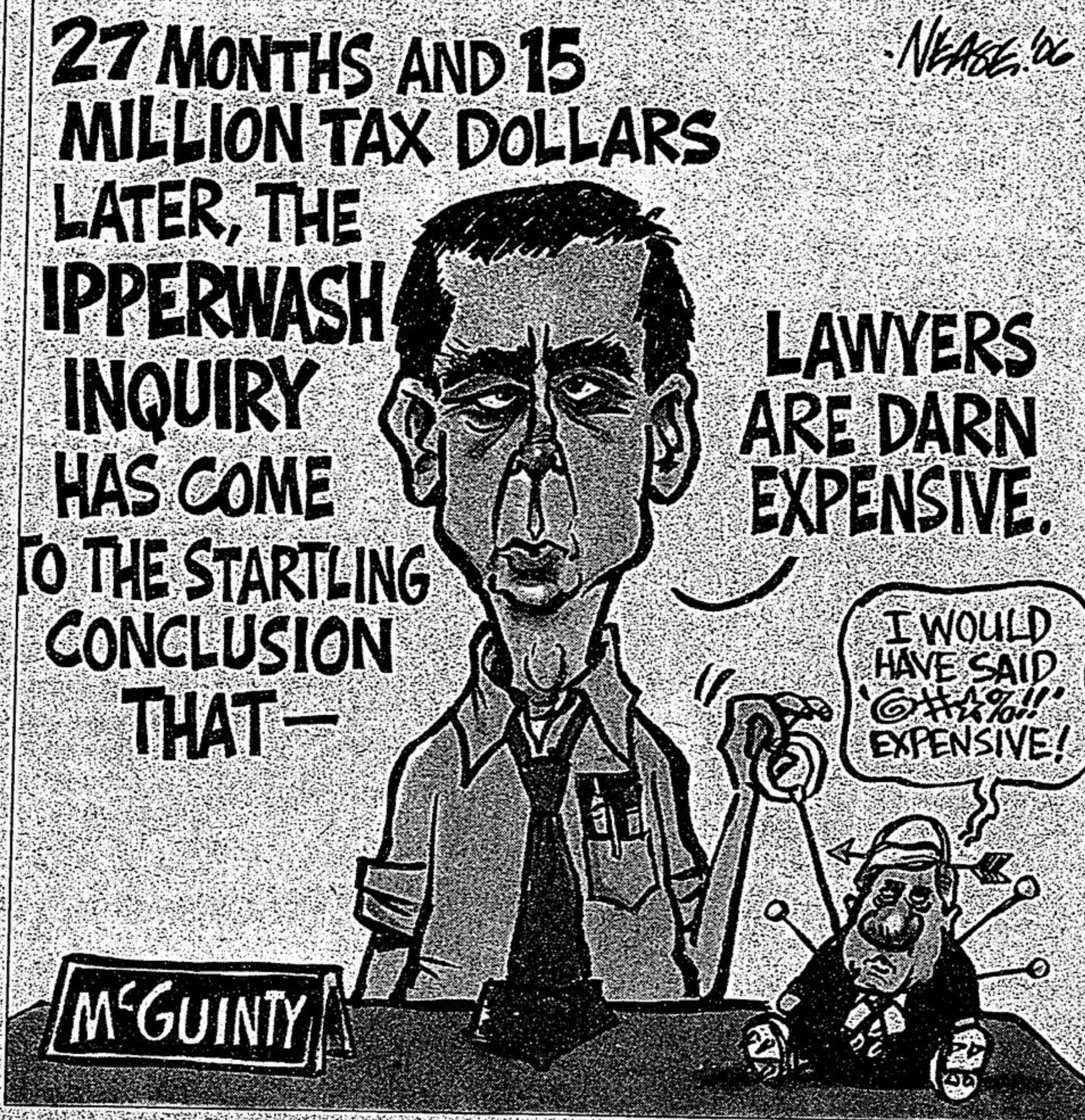
Muslims around the world have been angry with the United States over the past 50 years because of its unbridled support of Israel.

Finally, Mr. Annan's article speaks of the degradation of Jesus Christ. But he implies Muslims have had a hand in that.

This implication again illustrates his clear ignorance of Muslims. We revere Jesus. We love Jesus as much as we love Muhammad.

Our holy book, the Quran reminds us to make no distinctions among each other and not among the prophets.

AG AL-JOUNDI
MARKHAM



Minimum wage leads to maximum pain

My most painful duty in a quarter of a century as a manager was having to close down a manufacturing facility that employed nearly 50 people.

Many of them were earning minimum wage; some of them were developmentally handicapped.

It was the early 1990s when Ontario was in recession and business was difficult. With unemployment at high levels, the NDP decided it was a good time to increase the minimum wage.

This was the tipping point that made outsourcing my firm's processes more cost-effective. In the face of competition and the alternative of becoming a non-profit business, my hand was forced.

(Through five years of NDP economic incompetence, the business community's motto was "stay alive 'til '95". And now they're touting Bob Rae for federal Liberal leader. It

is to weep.)

It's said if all the economists in the world were laid end-to-end, they still wouldn't reach a consensus.

However, about 90 per cent of them agree on one thing: increasing the minimum wage leads to higher unemployment and is an extremely ineffective tool to reduce poverty.

Last month, the Ontario government increased the general minimum wage from \$7.45 to \$7.75 an hour, the third increase since Dalton McGuinty's Liberals came to power.

Next year, it's up again to \$8. Labour Minister Steve Peters claims to be helping the "lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers" because "it is to Ontario's economic advantage to see that our workers are paid a fair wage".

Fact is the most vulnerable workers are the ones who will be hurt, as their marginal value to their employers makes them unaffordable. A fair wage is actually



Bruce Annan

whatever a business is prepared to pay for a job a worker is prepared to accept.

If raising the rate to \$7.75 can help the working poor without damaging effect, then why not take it to \$10? Or \$20? And only a politician could pretend a "fair wage" is the same in Richmond Hill as in Sault Ste. Marie, in Markham as in Cornwall.

Who gets paid minimum wage? According to Statistics Canada, half are aged 15 to 19 and another 15 per cent aged 20 to 24. Most people getting a raise are kids living at

home and earning spending money.

As this newspaper reported, industry superstars such as Frank Stronach and Hugh Heron (not to mention this columnist) began work at minimum wage. The first job pays off in experience far more than in dollars.

But surely businesses can afford a paltry 30 cents an hour, can't they?

Surveys have shown most people believe companies make a 30 to 50 per cent profit on sales. In fact, the Ontario Restaurant, Hotel & Motel Association reports the average pre-tax profit among its bar, pub and tavern section, for instance, is less than 3 per cent of revenue.

Perhaps you can't find pity in your heart for business operators. Indeed, it's the poor you should pity when minimum wage increases both put people out of work and drive up prices. As economist Donald Deere wrote in 1998, "To add insult to injury for low-income

families, the minimum wage increases the cost of goods and services produced with low wage labour — goods and services that are purchased disproportionately by low-income families."

A fair wage is actually whatever a business is prepared to pay for a job a worker is prepared to accept.

If governments want to increase employment, help people get their feet on the first rung of a career and let business succeed, they shouldn't raise the minimum wage.

They should abolish it.

Bruce Annan is a York Region writer and consultant. He can be reached at bruce.annan@gmail.com. Comments regarding this column for the letters page can be sent to newsroom@theliberal.com.

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