

Another look at "distorted Muslim image"

by Reza Rizvi
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Ever since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the media has deliberately and systematically presented a distorted image of Islam and the Muslim way of living. The persistence of such false propaganda is bound to mislead the less critical audiences. Even our very own Dalhousie Gazette has recently promoted such biased and misleading information. Paul Withers, cartoonist of the Gazette, illustrated a distorted and biased image of Muslims. Such narrow-minded journalism has led to an unnecessary alienation and downright bigotry against Muslims. Centuries old falsehoods and stereotypes still exist today in an age of "enlightenment" and "scientific objectivity". Following are a few common - but false - stereotypes.

Allah, which is an Arabic term meaning 'the One and Only uni-

versal God of all', is depicted as some sort of heathen deity, Arabian god, or as an exclusive "God of Muslims".

Muslims, to this day, are depicted as camel-riding, sword-swinging Arabs, when in fact Arabs are a small minority among Muslims, who constitute nearly one-fifth of the world population (about one billion) in every continent, East and West.

Jihad (to strive in the path of God by all means, including self-purification) is repeatedly and intentionally mistranslated as "holy war". The defense of land and honour, a desire to topple human tyranny and oppression, is still depicted as evidence of Islam being a barbaric and ruthless religion. It seems that those who advocate that Islam spread by "the blood-stained sword" forget that Islam flourished in times of peace. During the last ten years, the Muslim population in the U.S. has increased by 400

per cent. Which conquest brought these conversions to Islam? Has a sword been hanging over the heads of these Muslims of America?

War is not an objective of Islam, nor is it the normal course of Muslims. It is only the last resort, when all other measures fail. This is the actual status of war in Islam. Islam is the religion of peace: its meaning is peace, the daily greetings of Muslims is peace. The very adjective Muslim means peaceful. One has to realize that peace is the nature, the meaning, the emblem, and the objective of Islam. However, whether we want it or not, war is a necessity of existence, and a fact of life, so long as there exist in this world injustice and oppression. It is this oppression and tyranny that Muslims are ordained to fight.

Muslim uprisings against the untold atrocities committed against them by criminal tyrants

and their hypocritical supporters and applauders in the East or West is presented as "irrational" and unjustifiable hatred against "peoples", rather than against these "peoples" deceptive, hypocritical and treacherous governments.

Muslims struggle to liberate their usurped or occupied lands and their pursuit of their basic human rights and self-determination is presented as terrorism. Desperate deviations of some of the dispossessed are used to stamp the whole struggle and conceal its essence and just claims. "Official" terrorism committed by governments, bombing and murdering of civilians, even refugees, is depicted as a kind of "reprisal" and defense of the security of the occupiers and usurpers (i.e. the freedom fighters!).

Surely the western reader is entitled to know the facts, to hear the other side of the story, to be

able to distinguish reality from widely circulated and frequently repeated falsehoods resulting from accumulated ignorance and distortions. Islam is seldom presented from the point of view of the Muslims; as they understand, interpret, and experience it, and as can be corroborated from authentic sources.

Reasonable media carries a grave and noble responsibility: to refrain from publishing defamatory, insulting and bigoted statements against other faiths or false stereotypes about its followers.

In the conflict-torn world of today, the pressing need is not for more distortions, but for more mutual respect and understanding. It is no longer possible or desirable to continue the present policy adopted by the media. It is time for all to speak up and to demand a "reasonable and informative media".

Loophole laughs

Tax reform for the bureaucrats

by Thomas Vradenburg

Income tax reform is a perennial favourite subject of Sunday afternoon speculation among the capital's technocratic elite, and with good reason.

But while tax reform has terrific potential to make Canadian economic life more equitable and stimulating, there are some very good reasons why it will not

happen; certainly not in the near future.

Last weekend I attended a tax reform conference laid on by a new leftist think tank called the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. While I am writing their in-house newsletter telling Centre members they missed a marvelous event, I'll take time out to tell you what really happened.

For my money, the most exciting speaker at this two-day technocrats' tea party was Neil Brooks, a tax law professor from Osgoode Hall. His beef with the present system is the poor cost-effectiveness of what are technically called tax expenditures and colloquially called loopholes.

Loopholes such as depreciation allowances for businessmen, depletion allowances for oil men, and dividend tax credits for rich men who invest in Canadian companies are cases in point.

These things are called tax expenditures because the Department of Finance keeps track of how much money slips out of the loopholes, out of its grasp. So it is a hidden form of spending; instead of being announced grandly as are grants and handouts, tax expenditures are listed among huge columns of numbers in the budget.

"The rules on (government economic) intervention should be clear," Brooks said.

In an article in Saturday Night last July, Brooks noted that tax expenditures for manufacturers alone cost \$2.5 billion between 1972 and 1975, but generated between \$340 and \$846 million in new investment. In terms of stimulating the economy, that's not much bang for the bucks.

While some of the most notorious loopholes were closed in the November budget, there are many more that should be examined for their cost-effectiveness. One can never be free of loopholes, but Brooks would contend the fewer there are the better.

But there are two major reasons no one in government is interested in tax reform: a) the lobby groups are dead against losing their loopholes, and b) the public does not understand and does not like taxes.

Lobby groups representing big business, small business, oil companies, and the tax lawyers, even the Canadian Labour Congress will defend their favourite



"Sure corporations pay millions of dollars in bribes to government officials - but remember, in some countries that's the standard operating procedure. Ours, for instance..."

loopholes to the death. Not only do they represent large constituencies; they can generate a lot of press coverage.

And they are unopposed. "There is no tax reform lobby," Brooks said.

The idea is hard to sell to the public, said Alf Gleave, a former NDP MP, "because taxes are not popular."

R.B. Bryce was Deputy Minister of Finance during the drafting of the Carter Royal Commission Report, the White Paper, and the tax reforms of 1971. He said he found it hard to get Cabinet ministers interested because they could not understand it, and did not think it was politically saleable.

Part of the problem is comprehension. I spoke to one tax lawyer who said he and his colleagues became specialists on individual sections of the Income Tax Act.

The conference was billed as a rally for the cause of tax reform, but it looked more like a series of fairly sober technical presentations. Many of these were interesting in themselves, but only for the initiated (and I was not one of those). Professor Lars Osberg of

Dal's Economics Department gave a speech entitled "The Effects of Tax Incentives on Individual Behaviour".

Among the elite at least, such think tank gatherings are a favourite ritual, not unlike Fred Flintstone attending his beloved Water Buffalos conventions.

For almost everyone else in Ottawa, politics is a diversion, when the weather is bad and there are no good movies on.



Redmond/Dal Photo

Monday Mindpower got off to a Renaissance start this week in the Green Room. Next week's lunchtime event brings the Dal Jazz Band.