

2016-16: Moher vs London Free Press

A complaint that articles about Syrian immigrants and Muslims will attract “hate-filled” comments was dismissed by the National NewsMedia Council.

Complainant Charles Moher objected specifically to a February 26, 2016, article “Walk a mile in her hijab” and an online poll “Do you know anyone who wears the hijab”, saying they are “fanning the flames” of racism.

The article described a secondary school event where students were offered the chance to learn about, discuss and try wearing a hijab for a short time within the school.

The paper characterized the article as describing a community-driven effort to promote understanding and tolerance. It also explained that the online poll is one of several tools the paper uses to engage with readers.

Council agreed with the paper’s stance that asking readers a question about clothing does not amount to racism.

The complainant’s concern centred on reaction the story and poll might attract, rather than on the content of the story itself. Council found there was no stereotyping in the story; instead women of different backgrounds gave varied and personal views on wearing the hijab.

While the paper admitted need to take care in considering reaction to stories in terms of reader comments, it defended posting stories as contributing to a forum of discussion. Council supported the position that selective posting is fraught with ‘grey areas’.

In deciding to dismiss the complaint, Council noted the story was fair, positive, and did not promote stereotypes. No reasonable reading could interpret the story as inciting hatred.

It also found the poll is a simple yes or no, and is an accepted feature that papers use for encouraging reader engagement.