

2023-117: Multiple v Toronto Sun

January 9, 2024 – for immediate release

The National NewsMedia Council (NNC) found that corrective action was taken to address a complaint about a syndicated cartoon published by the Toronto Sun on December 20, 2023.

The NNC received more than two dozen complaints about a cartoon that depicted the Ukrainian President picking the pocket of the U.S. President.

Complainants pointed out that the cartoon used antisemitic stereotypes and inaccurately characterized Ukraine war efforts.

In response to concerns raised by readers, the Toronto Sun removed the cartoon and published an editorial noting that the cartoon did not meet editorial standards and that the news organization will no longer run the syndicated cartoon.

In considering the matter, the NNC reviewed the concerns raised by numerous individuals as well as the news organization's steps following the publication of the cartoon, including the published editorial and other commentary.

The NNC supports the prerogative of news organizations to publish third party content, including news articles, opinion columns, and other editorial material. The NNC also upholds long-accepted journalistic practice giving columnists and opinion writers wide latitude to express unpopular views. This latitude extends to editorial cartoonists, who often use exaggeration and visual shorthand to comment on current events. Editorial cartoons are not held to the standard of news reporting, which demands balance and must be unbiased.

That said, the NNC has also consistently stated that sensitive matters must be treated appropriately and that news organizations take care not to cause undue harm. In rare cases where significant editorial mistakes are made, errors are corrected promptly and any changes are communicated to readers in a clear and consistent manner.

In this case, the NNC noted that the cartoon was removed the following day and an editorial ran shortly after the decision to remove the image explaining the news organization's decisions. In addition to stating that the cartoon did not meet editorial standards and would no longer appear in the publication, the editorial apologized to readers for the image's use of antisemitic stereotypes and other false implications. It also ran opinion content that raised similar points as the complainants.

While many complainants expressed their desire to see disciplinary action taken against newsroom staff, the NNC noted that it has no mandate over human resources matters in individual newsrooms, as that is the prerogative of individual news organizations and outside the scope of journalistic standards.

Importantly, the role of the NNC is not to sanction individual journalists but to uphold journalistic standards and best practices, which includes supporting appropriate resolutions of journalistic errors.

In light of the steps taken by the news organization as outlined above, the NNC found that the matter was resolved due to corrective action.