

2016-74: Scott Langille vs New Glasgow News

December 15, 2016 - *For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint from Scott Langille that an article and opinion piece in the New Glasgow News promoted hatred through biased reporting and misleading information.

The complainant objected that the media released too much information about a man charged with damaging a crosswalk, which had been painted in rainbow colours in honour of Culture Days.

He stated the columnist “deliberately twisted” comments to promote “hatred and racism” toward the suspect. He also raised concern that the suspect would not get a fair trial in the community because of allegations in the column. He said the paper should remove the columnist and retract the article.

In a follow-up comment, the complainant pointed to Facebook comments to support his view that the column incited hatred.

The news media organization said that the news article was based on a press release from the police department and interview with an activist affected by the damage, who is also the paper’s columnist.

It noted the second article was clearly labeled as opinion, and cited the traditional prerogative of opinion writers to express strong and sometimes unpopular views. It noted the inappropriate comments were not on its social media, nor did the columnist encourage vigilante action.

The news media organization offered the complainant the option of submitting a letter to the editor, and spoke in favour of hearing diverse view points.

In considering the complaint, the NewsMedia Council found the news article followed standard journalistic practices in making use of information from police and comment from community leaders. The Council found no evidence that information had been manipulated for bias or to incite hatred, and no breach of journalistic standards.

Council noted the comments from the community activist, who is also the columnist, stated the accused should have been aware of the consequences of his action, and found balance was provided by other comments suggesting the incident was an isolated case of bad judgement.

It was noted that the name of the accused was withheld, a practice that is within standard journalistic practice in situations where the case may not be followed in court, the community is small, or in deference to the principle of innocent until proven guilty. Council considered the complainant’s concern about ability to receive a fair trial as well intentioned but largely irrelevant in view of the charges.

In dismissing the complaint about the opinion article, Council found the writer followed accepted journalistic practices. The strongly-worded viewpoint stated the accused “purposely” destroyed the symbol, that the action was done “with a vengeance” and that it was a “vicious way of destruction”.

That viewpoint might not be shared by all readers, but Council found no indication that the columnist incited hatred and found no breach of journalistic standards.

Council noted the news media organizations is not responsible for comments on social media other than on its own, and supported the offer of a letter to the editor and commitment to hearing differing viewpoints.