
APPENDIX B

CBSC Decision 06/07-1428 CFRB-AM re an episode of the *Michael Coren Show*

The Complaint

The CBSC received the following complaint dated August 14, 2007 via the CRTC:

On Sunday August 12, 2007, on CFRB, I heard Michael Coren, on his evening show, advocate to his listeners the killing of all pit-bull dogs, and the killing of their owners. Proposing that people be shot is totally unacceptable. The station and the announcer need to be disciplined. These comments were at 15 minutes to the hour, and continued for at least 15 minutes. I believe the time was 7:45 pm, but I may be one hour off, as I was on the highway, and at the end of a lengthy drive.

Broadcaster's Response

The broadcaster responded to the complainant on August 26:

[L.] ... the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has forwarded me your complaint about the August 12th *Michael Coren Show* (CBSC File #C06/07-1428) about his discussion of pit-bulls and their owners who take no responsibilities for the actions of their dogs when they attack people or other dogs.

The topic for the hour was prompted by the pit-bull attack of a Whitby couple out walking their dog.

I listened to the entire hour of the show between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm to get the entire context of the broadcast. To hear what Michael Coren was saying about pit-bulls and their owners.

The topic began with a description of what happened to the Whitby couple. A pit-bull attacked them and their dog resulting in serious injury to the dog and the couple being bitten.

The owner called off his pit-bull and gave them a phone number to contact him -- the phone number turned out to be false. Authorities are trying to track down the owner and the dog to determine if it has rabies [sic]. If they can't find the owner or the dog the Whitby couple will have to undergo painful rabies [sic] shots.

Michael referred to pit-bull owners like this as morons:

"Everytime this happens you get the usual idiots who say 'oh no, no, no ... it's the owner's fault ... the animals are fine' ... well people who own pit-bulls are moronic by nature. I've never in my life seen anyone with a pit-bull who was ... worth a moment of my time... of all the breed of dogs you can own ... if you buy a pit-bull you're trying to make a statement ... 'I'm some white trash semi criminal who wants you to be frightened of me' that's generally the statement being made.

"The government tried to deal with pit-bulls ... it has to go further ... get rid of them all now. Round them up ...put them to sleep ... just round them up and get rid of them ... so much damage caused by them and there is no point in them being here.

"I don't think you have to be humane ... they're not human are they? They're animals and they do cause a great deal of damage and there is nothing positive about them and the owners. At this point anyone who tries to purchase one I'd make it a criminal offence and punish them.

"I've done so many interviews with people attacked by these bloody things ... to expunge the breed from the face of the earth would be the best thing..."

Coming back from traffic Michael, with tongue in cheek, says "we could have a public hunt of pit-bulls ... charge people ... it could reduce financial problems of the City of Toronto. Charge them 20 bucks ... a lot of pit-bulls around ... we could raise a lot of money ... you gotta think outside the box here ... this is how we're going to solve the issue

"Ask the cops ... the pit-bull is really the dog of choice ... the weapon of choice of the criminal class ... not only should we take the pit-bulls away ... I'm serious about this ... not hurt them but kill them ... don't inflict pain on them ... and the owners ... kill them ... but inflict pain ... no, no, no obviously you can't do do that ..."

It is obvious with his last statement quoted above that he was being sarcastic ... making a point he immediately says would be wrong. This is a comment that when taken in the context of what was being discussed ... a reasonably intelligent person would know right away that Michael wasn't serious about killing owners of pit-bulls.

This was further emphasized when Michael added: " ... but punish them by forcing them to walk around with mini poodles or something ..."

Later around 7:49 pm which is probably around the time you heard the show ... Michael said just before going to a commercial: "would it be more fun to shoot pit-bulls or their owners ... no ... I'm only joking ..."

Michael then criticized the government and the attorney general in particular about their lack of enforcement of the anti pit-bull legislation:

"The Attorney General has done nothing about the pit-bulls. He should be much harder ... much more draconian ..."

We don't believe anyone listening to the entire show would come away with the conclusion that Michael Coren was serious about the urging of pit-bull owners to be shot. For those who tuned in like you did at 7:49 he made it very clear that he was just joking.

If Michael had made those comments and not added that he was joking or earlier telling listeners "obviously you can't do that" ... then I believe the complaint would be justified. But this isn't the case ... the host is exaggerating a point to make a stand and generate phone calls, but at the same time he is informing listeners that it was a joke or that they shouldn't act on his suggestion. This is similar to television issuing viewer discretion warnings for shows depicting mature themes or graphic violence.

That said, we will raise your complaint with Michael Coren so that he understands that even comments labelled as a joke could be misinterpreted by the listener.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. At CFRB we take complaints seriously.

Additional Correspondence

The complainant filed his Ruling Request on August 27:

I have received a response from [S. K.], Operations Manager of CFRB, sent August 26, 2007, and pasted it at the end of this e-mail for reference.

I am not satisfied with the response, and shall address some of the points below. Where I have quotation marks around text, I will be quoting from the body of the letter from [the Operations Manager].

I trust that the CBSC is being supplied with a complete and full transcript of the full show, and thank [the Operations Manager] for supplying some excerpts for me to address. Perhaps I could also be supplied the full transcript.

"about his discussion of pit-bulls and their owners who take no responsibilities for the actions of their dogs when they attack people or other dogs."

Mr. Coren went way beyond limiting his comments to only pit-bulls who have attacked, and the owners of those dogs. My complaint addresses the owners of pit-bulls who have dogs who are not trained to be aggressive, but are indeed good, safe family pets.

"well people who own pit-bulls are moronic by nature. I've never in my life seen anyone with a pit-bull who was ... worth a moment of my time..."

"They're animals and they do cause a great deal of damage and there is nothing positive about them and the owners. At this point anyone who tries to purchase one I'd make it a criminal offense and punish them."

"and the owners ... kill them ... but inflict pain ... no, no, no obviously you can't do do that ... "

"would it be more fun to shoot pit-bulls or their owners ... no ... I'm only joking ..."

"If Michael had made those comments and not added that he was joking or earlier telling listeners 'obviously you can't do that' ... then I believe the complaint would be justified. But this isn't the case ... the host is exaggerating a point to make a stand and generate phone calls but at the same time he is informing listeners that it was a joke or that they shouldn't act on his suggestion. This is similar to television issuing viewer discretion warnings for shows depicting mature themes or graphic violence."

Had Mr. Coren said, "Kill all the Jews. No wait I'm joking", his words would not be negated. This is not at all similar to warnings on TV programs. There is no parallel at all. He has tarred all owners of all pit-bulls.

I have a dear friend who owns 3 lovely dogs, eleven, nine and two years old. They were purchased from responsible breeders, and have never in their lives harmed a human or another dog. They are as loving as any pet dogs could be. And they are pit-bulls.

Michael Coren would have these dogs shot for bounty and proposes shooting the owner too, on his CFRB radio show of August 12, 2007. I see these remarks as a hate crime.

The man has suggested killing the all owners of pit-bulls, regardless of their pet's behaviour. This is an identifiable group of people. It is irresponsible of CFRB to have allowed this to take place. The station and its announcer should be sanctioned.

A public apology should be made. Mr. Coren should educate himself on the facts.

It is not the breed that is a problem; it is some of the owners. I suggest he read the BBC article, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6960788.stm>.

These are the folks that need to be punished. And any dogs trained to do harm should be properly dealt with regardless of breed.

Is Mr. Coren aware that in Canada, Michael Vick would be subject to only 6 months maximum for his deeds? Perhaps he should rail against these paltry penalties?

I propose that Mr. Coren be told to devote an hour of radio time to discussion of pit-bulls who are not a problem.

Let him interview my friend, and meet her dogs, and then dare to say that she is a moron, and should be beaten or killed, and that her dogs should be hunted for bounty. Let him speak to an expert on dogs such as Stanley Coren.

"It is obvious with his last statement quoted above that he was being sarcastic ... making a point he immediately says would be wrong. This is a comment that when taken in the context of what was being discussed ... a reasonably intelligent (my italics) person would know right away that Michael wasn't serious about killing owners of pit-bulls."

Perhaps. But we are talking about the listeners of the Michael Coren show, not "reasonably intelligent" people.

To end on a lighter note:

"Authorities are trying to track down the owner and the dog to determine if it has rabbi. If they can't find the owner or the dog the Whitby couple will have to undergo painful rabbi shots."

I don't see how the dog's religion enters into this, but thanks for the laugh.

I request that the CBSC conduct a proper inquiry into this event.