AN UNLIKELY VOICE MUST BE SUPPORTED

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Category: Opinions

Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia, PA USA, 8 May 2009

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Just such an opportunity has now arisen and it is incumbent on Armenians to get involved--at the very least, to submit *amicus curiae* briefs in support of the defendant.

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The defendant in this case is an unlikely one and is being sued by someone who is among the leading denialists of the Armenian Genocide.

Known for its studies of hate groups, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) published an article, "State of Denial," last year, in which it criticized Guenter Lewy, saying that "Lewy is one of the most active members of a network of American scholars, influence peddlers and website operator, financed by hundreds of thousand of dollars each year from the government of Turkey, who promote the denial of the Armenian Genocide." The other statement to which Lewy objects, in his lawsuit, says, "Lewy makes similar revisionist claims in his 2005 book 'The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide,' and in frequent lectures at university campuses across the country. . . . Revisionist historians who conjure doubt about the Armenian genocide and are paid by the Turkish government provided politicians with the intellectual cover they needed to claim they were refusing to dictate history rather than caving in to a foreign government's present-day interests."

Charging the SPLC with defamation, Lewy is reported to be seeking millions of dollars, claiming the statements "are defamatory because they falsely impute to Plaintiff academic corruption, fraud and deceit. . . ." As a result of the accusations, the suit says that Lewy has had his "scholarly credibility" hurt and has lost book sales and speaking engagements.

There is no need to go into more detail, since most Armenians know--or should know--Lewy's denialist views.

This lawsuit is somewhat reminiscent of the case brought by David Irving against Deborah Lipstadt, in 1996, in London, because she had said some things about Irving and his denial of the Genocide of the Jews, in World War Two. He, too, sued. However, in that case, Jews from around the world rallied to Lipstadt's cause. One famous Hollywood personality sent the Lipstadt Defense Fund a

check for $750,000 with a note "more if you need it."

(I remarked at the time, if an Armenian found himself in the same situation as Lipstadt, would any Armenian send a check for $750,000, or $75,000, or $7500, or $750, or $75, or $7.50? We know the answer to that.)

The SPLC is always in need of money in its fight for the good cause, but whether or not the SPLC is seeking funds in its defense of the lawsuit, I know it won't get it from the Armenians, However, there is no reason why our "advocacy" groups in Washington, for instance, should not get involved with the "friend of the court" briefs. There is no reason why other Armenian organizations should not get involved, similarly. There is no reason why individual Armenians should not get involved.

We know that when push comes to shove, the lip-service politicians aren't worth a damn, else I would suggest that they be contacted to also act in support of the SPLC's statements about Lewy and his "scholarship."

Someone should send a copy of the statement by the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and a copy of the report from the International Center for Transitional Justice to the court--or, at least, to the SPLC.

We Armenians must not assume that the SPLC will have the kinds of facts and information we know exists. The lawyers among us should know what is needed and how that "what" can and should be presented. But, individual
Armenians should also show their support of the SPLC.

Lewy is being supported, in his lawsuit. by the Turkish American Legal Defense Fund, and his lawyer is Bruce Fein who, himself, has written extensively denying the Armenian Genocide.

By the way, for those with short memories, David Irving lost his case, and the judge possibly went beyond the bounds of decorum by saying some nasty things about Irving.