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SOL GORDON LOSES LIBEL CASE

Sol Gordon, one of the most influential promoters of sex education, has met his match. He has just been dealt a stunning defeat by a plucky Canadian mother.

Sol Gordon is a professor of children and family studies at the University of Syracuse who has made a name for himself as the author of sex therapy books and pamphlets. Anyone who has been concerned with the immorality of classroom sexuality education could not have escaped knowing about Sol Gordon.

At the peak of his prestige, in June 1982, he filed a libel suit against a wife and mother in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, because of a letter she had written to the city council the preceding January protesting the use of taxpayers' funds for Gordon's forthcoming lecture there. His lecture fee was paid by the Family Service Bureau and Planned Parenthood, both of which receive public funding.

Many people in the United States and Canada agree with Mrs. Caswell, and have said as much, and more. Gordon singled out Mrs. Caswell for a lawsuit because it is easier to win a libel suit in Canada than in the United States. He obviously also thought he had a vulnerable target because she is a young mother with several children.

During the course of the controversy, Mrs. Caswell became so concerned about public affairs that she ran and was elected to the Saskatchewan Provincial Legislature. Shortly after that, Gordon apparently got cold feet and tried to settle his case out of court, if only Mrs. Caswell would apologize.

Mrs. Caswell refused to settle, however, knowing that, if she did, Gordon would use her apology as "evidence" that what she said was not true. She determined to go ahead with the litigation and the expense of a trial, plus the possible loss of her new political career, in order to expose what Gordon is doing.

In her letter, Mrs. Caswell had said that Gordon condones any type of sexual expression, including wholesale availability of contraceptives and abortion, and that he opposes parental responsibility and Judeo-Christian morality. She also claimed that the

movie, "About Sex," for which Gordon acted as consultant, shows that Gordon's philosophy is "akin to pornography."

The 15-minute film features a discussion about sex among teenagers. It promotes acceptance and tolerance of various sexual behavior including homosexuality and masturbation, and refers to abortion as "easy and safe." Parents are mentioned in the film only as people teenagers could not talk with. Sex is dealt with as a natural impulse and is not referred to in terms of family life.

Gordon claimed that the quotations used by Mrs. Caswell were not completely accurate and were taken out of context, and that her letter damaged his reputation. She testified that, although the quotes were not exact, they are an accurate reflection of Gordon's views.

When it comes to a libel case, the defendant's best defense is truth. So Mrs. Caswell presented as evidence Gordon's "Zing Sex Comix" (a comic book about sex aimed at teenagers), several of his books and articles in professional journals, and his film "About Sex" (which was shown to the court).

The Humanist Manifesto II, of which Gordon is a signer, was used as evidence that he opposes Judeo-Christian morality. Mrs. Caswell's lawyer also read to the court a transcript from U.S. Senate hearings at which Senator Orrin Hatch had called this movie disgusting, gross, pornographic, and tasteless.

After a three-day trial in the Canadian court, May 14-17, Mrs. Caswell won a total victory. Sol Gordon's libel suit was dismissed because he could not prove that Mrs. Caswell's statements about him were false. The judge ruled that anyone could have gotten the same message from Gordon's materials as Mrs. Caswell did.

Under questioning at the trial, Mrs. Caswell testified that she had been "pro-choice" about abortion until she saw a photograph of an unborn baby ripped apart by a vacuum machine. She said she then realized that the unborn baby is not "just a mass of cells," and that abortion is part of the agenda of those who want to destroy traditional family life.

In her victory statement after the court decision, Mrs. Caswell said the decision will "confirm in the public mind what Planned Parenthood is all about" and will encourage more parents to speak out.