Guardian cartoonist's contract not renewed after Netanyahu drawing

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London, October 19 (RHC)-- The British news outlet The Guardian says it will not renew cartoonist Steve Bell's contract after he submitted a cartoon depicting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Bell said the cartoon, which shows Netanyahu preparing to operate on his own stomach with an outline of Gaza, was rejected by the outlet for evoking the anti-Semitic "pound of flesh" trope, a reference to the character Shylock in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.

The character of Shylock, one of the best-known examples of literary anti-Semitism, has been used for centuries to promote a racist depiction of Jews as greedy and obsessed with money. Bell said in a post on X that he submitted the cartoon last week and "received an ominous phone call from the desk with the strangely cryptic message 'pound of flesh.'"

When Bell said he did not understand the message, he said he "received this even more mysterious reply 'Jewish bloke; pound of flesh; antisemitic trope.'" Bell told the BBC that the accusations "made no sense to me, as there is no reference to that play [Merchant of Venice] in my cartoon, which shows Netanyahu, poised to perform a surgical operation on himself while wearing boxing gloves, the catastrophic consequences of which are yet to be seen." He said it was inspired by an old cartoon of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War.

A spokesperson for The Guardian told The Telegraph that it would not renew Bell's contract. The row comes as tensions rise between pro-Palestinian groups and Israeli supporters around the world amid Israel's war against Hamas, the Palestinian group which governs the besieged Gaza Strip. Israel has bombarded the coastal enclave relentlessly for 10 days, killing more than 2,000 people, after Hamas launched a surprise attack on southern Israel on October 7, killing more than 1,400 people.

Authorities in some countries have been accused of cracking down on civil liberties in the name of defusing communal tensions, with France banning pro-Palestinian protests and government officials in the United Kingdom asking whether waving a Palestinian flag could be a criminal offence.

On Tuesday, a surgeon working at a hospital in Gaza said in a social media post that his family in the UK had been visited and "harassed" by British counterterrorism forces after he had spoken with the BBC about deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza, where Israel has cut off access to food, water and electricity for the strip's 2.3 million residents.

In the United States, a six-year-old Palestinian-American boy named Wadea Al-Fayoume was stabbed to death and his mother was seriously wounded on on Sunday. Police said they had arrested a suspect, who had singled out the victims because of their Muslim faith and as a response to the Israel-Hamas war.

In the United Kingdom, police in London have reported a "massive increase" in anti-Semitic incidents. Between September 30 and October 13, there were 105 anti-Semitic incidents and 75 anti-Semitic offences in the city, compared with 14 incidents and 12 offences in the same period last year, according to police figures.

"In balance, we have seen an increase in Islamophobic incidents, but nothing like the scale of the increase in antisemitism," Deputy Assistant Commissioner Laurence Taylor told a press briefing on Friday.

Community leaders have urged calm, underscoring the necessity of abstaining from attacks on Jewish or Muslim people in response to events overseas.

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