The Debate Over Reasonable Accommodation of Minority Practices Comes to Alberta

Recently, Tejinder Singh Sidhu was turned away from a Calgary courthouse because he was carrying a Kirpan, a Sikh ceremonial dagger.[1] The incident evokes memories of the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in Multani v. Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys and Attorney General of Quebec. In Multani, the SCC ruled that a Montreal school violated a student's religious freedom when it banned him from wearing his Kirpan to school.[2] In that case, although the SCC found that the school went too far in imposing an outright ban, it further ruled that the school could impose certain safety conditions, such keeping the Kirpan concealed and sewn into the student's clothing.

The Kirpan incident in Montreal is one of many incidents that have sparked an intense debate over reasonable accommodation in Quebec. Indeed, reasonable accommodation became an issue in the most recent provincial election and Premier Charest created a special committee to investigate the issue.

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[1] CTV.ca News Staff, "Courthouse denies entry to a Sikh man wearing a Kirpan", online: CTV.ca.

[2] Multani v. Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys and Attorney General of Quebec, 2006 SCC 6 (CanLII).