

For Immediate Release – January 28, 2014

Laura Robinson sues John Furlong for defamation

Yesterday I filed a Notice of Civil Claim against John Furlong and TwentyTen Group in BC Supreme Court, and immediately set the case for trial commencing March 30, 2015. Over the holiday season I had lengthy and deep discussions with family members about the allegations made against me by John Furlong. Of particular concern was the smear campaign Mr. Furlong and TwentyTen Group engaged in during the late fall of 2013. It was clear to me as a result of those discussions that Mr. Furlong's unfounded allegations could not go unanswered. As a journalist my reputation and integrity are of utmost importance to me. A copy of the Notice of Civil Claim is attached.

In the action I am seeking general, aggravated and punitive damages, as well as an injunction, for the unrelenting attack by Mr. Furlong and his media advisors over the last fourteen months.

In September 2012 the Georgia Straight published a thoroughly researched investigative story that I wrote about John Furlong's previously undisclosed past as a missionary teacher at Catholic schools in northern British Columbia. After giving Mr. Furlong numerous opportunities to give his side of the story and in advance of publishing the story, I provided Mr. Furlong's lawyer with sworn affidavits from several witnesses attesting to the facts set out in the story. For reasons only known to Mr. Furlong, he chose not to provide any substantive response.

Instead, following the publication of my piece in the Straight, Mr. Furlong responded by having the TwentyTen Group call a press conference and issue a media release, attacking my personal and professional integrity, my competence as a journalist, and my diligence in researching the story. Most shockingly, he accused me of launching a personal vendetta against him and implied that I had attempted to extort money from him in exchange for making the story "go away" (this is an utter fabrication).

Over the ensuing fourteen months Mr. Furlong, with the active assistance of TwentyTen Group, escalated the campaign of misinformation. In October 2012 they accused me of fabricating allegations in the story, of having contempt for the Olympic movement and of targeting Mr. Furlong because I apparently attack male authority figures in sport (another fabrication). The campaign culminated in a media onslaught at the end of October 2013 where they trampled my integrity as a journalist, labeling me an "activist" who knowingly lied in writing the story and, most troublingly, they falsely alleged that I laid a complaint of sexual abuse against Mr. Furlong with the RCMP on behalf of a former student.

None of what Mr. Furlong said about me, as set out above, is true. Rather it was part of an attempt by Mr. Furlong to try his defamation claim in the media as opposed to a court of law. It is telling that despite numerous requests from my counsel Mr. Furlong has refused to set his action for trial.

On November 13, 2013 my counsel demanded a full retraction and apology. Instead of responding, Mr. Furlong renewed his attack in the media by having TwentyTen Group issue a further Press Release accusing me of being an activist with a "historic pattern of inaccuracy". A further demand for a full retraction and apology went unanswered.

This assault against my good name and integrity as a journalist and author is by implication an attack against freedom of expression and the role investigative journalism plays in a free, democratic and civil society. Mr. Furlong and TwentyTen Group have turned a very serious issue--allegations of physical and racial abuse of children made by courageous and vulnerable First Nations people--into a disturbingly vitriolic and untrue campaign against a journalist.

This ordeal has been very harmful to me and my family and extraordinarily harmful to the First Nations people who trusted they would be listened to with compassion and respect. Instead of trying to heal relationships with First Nations people, Mr. Furlong and TwentyTen Group have caused them and me serious trauma and hardship. Interviewing First Nations people who disclose allegations of abuse in their childhoods, and writing about them, particularly in a time when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is asking First Nations people to speak of their experiences, should not cost journalists and their families their livelihood and their reputation.

Mr. Furlong's attack in the fall of 2013 was timed just after I was selected to deliver the paper "*Truth, Lies and History: John Furlong and Canadian Sports' Moral Vacuum*" at "Play the Game: Stepping Up For Democracy in Sport" in Denmark. This was the Eighth World Communication Conference on Sport and Society that the Danish organization has held. It brings together athletes, coaches, scientists, sport administrators, and journalists who are committed to democracy, anti-corruption, transparency and freedom of expression within sport. (http://www.playthegame.org/fileadmin/image/PtG2013/Presentations/30_October_Wednesday/Laura_Robinson_Truth_Lies_and_History.pdf)

I am grateful to the many Canadians and those in other countries who have supported my defence fund and sent wishes of support to me and the students. I would like to particularly thank those in Ireland. This story has always been about the defence of an accurate telling of Canadian history. Mistruths and malice have no place in a civil society and that is why I must now defend against the attacks made by Mr. Furlong and TwentyTen Group.

I will not be making a further statement at this time nor will my legal team at Harper Grey LLP.