



News Release

TORIES ACT TO PROTECT FILM BIZ FROM CAMCORDERS... WHILE REFUSING TO PROTECT GIRLS AND WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

“[The ‘wife beater’ undershirt] as a cultural phenomenon, is actually a perfect metaphor for the ambient misogyny that is so pervasive we don’t even notice it any more.”¹

Toronto, Ontario – May 12, 2007: Reacting to appeals from the powerful film industry, Stephen Harper’s New Government plans to introduce *Criminal Code* changes this spring to protect the industry from the terrible threat of **camcorders**². In contrast, the Tories have ignored appeals to change the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law to protect girls and women from **violence**. Indeed, not content with passive neglect on this issue of critical importance to our safety and human rights, prominent Conservatives actively **defeated** just such a Bill on April 19 in the House of Commons.

“It’s disappointing to watch the Harper government move quickly to protect the interests of a powerful industry from some perceived threat to their already fat bottom lines, while refusing to act on the very real threat posed to the safety of girls and women by the misogynist material that sluices through this country like an open sewer,” said Valerie Smith, a Toronto anti-violence activist. “Sucking up to the powerful while stomping on the vulnerable doesn’t seem like a winning election strategy to me,” said Smith, “but apparently it does to Mr. Harper’s advisors.”

OFL Adds Support to Call for *Criminal Code* Changes: At a Queen’s Park press conference in January, a broad-based Ontario coalition issued a public appeal to the federal government to change the hate propaganda law to protect girls and women. The coalition includes the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association, Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, Ontario Federation of Home & School Associations, Ontario Principals’ Council, Ontario Provincial Police, Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, and Ontario Student Trustees’ Association.

In April, the 700,000 member Ontario Federation of Labour added its support to this call for change. Irene Harris, OFL officer responsible for women’s issues, calls the *Criminal Code* amendment, “an important step in the struggle to end violence against women and girls.”³

Bill to Amend the *Criminal Code* Voted Down by Conservatives: On April 19, Liberal MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre) introduced a motion in the House of Commons calling for all party support to pass Bill C-254, a Private Member’s Bill to add girls and women to the groups protected under the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law.

¹ Wifebeaters in XXS, Ottawa Citizen, April 22, 2007

² Hand-held cameras in theatres to be outlawed, CanWest News Service, May 11, 2007

³ OFL in Full Support of Coalition to Protect Women From Hate Propaganda, Focus, April 2007

All three opposition parties voted in favour, but the Bill was defeated when Conservative House Leader Peter Van Loan, Conservative Party Whip Jay Hill, and Conservative MP Tom Lukiwski, voted against it. This is the **second time Conservative politicians have defeated this important legislation.**

Calling Stéphane Dion! If Mr. Dion wishes to be perceived as credible on the issue of promoting equality for women, he needs to adopt this issue as a party priority and have a new **votable** Bill introduced in the House of Commons at once. Given the minority situation, Conservative support isn't necessary to get this law passed. The opposition parties can do it by themselves, so it isn't good enough for them to say the Tories defeated the Bill and leave it at that.

"The Harper Conservatives have shown they care nothing about the safety of girls and women by voting down Bill C-254, so it is up to the opposition parties to get this law introduced and passed," said Smith. "Mr. Dion has the power to change the situation and he must be held accountable if he does not."

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About The Free Radical: The Free Radical web site (www.fradical.com) is maintained by Toronto anti-violence activist Valerie Smith to provide information on media violence and strategies for combating it. Smith has lobbied on media violence issues for the past sixteen years, with a particular focus on the treatment of women and girls in popular culture. She is the author of the *Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada*, funded and published by Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime, an agency of the Ministry of the Attorney General. The report is available for free download from The Free Radical web site.

For additional background on Bill C-254, visit http://www.fradical.com/Hate_Propaganda.htm.