



News Release

TORIES BLOCK EFFORTS TO PROTECT WOMEN FROM HATE PROPAGANDA

“Canada will not be a safe haven for those who promote hatred.” - Stockwell Day

Toronto, Ontario – December 11, 2007: The Harper government continues to block efforts to add women to the groups protected under the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law. Currently, the law only protects those distinguished by colour, race, religion, ethnic origin and sexual orientation, leaving women defenceless against those who promote misogyny. Last week in the House of Commons, Liberal MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj asked Justice Minister Rob Nicholson if he would add women to the protected groups:

“Mr. Speaker, today marks the 18th anniversary of the massacre of 14 women at Montreal's École Polytechnique, yet the glorification of violence toward women continues. We do not tolerate incitement to violence based on ethnicity, race, religion or sexual orientation. All are protected by law, yet incitement to violence toward women is not included.

“Will the minister agree today to adding one word, "sex", the legal description for gender, to existing hate crimes legislation and end gender-based incitement to violence and hatred?”¹

Mr. Nicholson gave a response, but did not answer the question.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre) has twice introduced a Private Member's Bill (Bill C-254) to add women to the groups protected under the hate propaganda law, but the Conservatives repeatedly undermine his efforts to get the Bill passed. Last April, Conservative House Leader Peter Van Loan, Party Whip Jay Hill, and Conservative MP Tom Lukiwski voted against a special motion introduced by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj that would have seen Bill C-254 pass,² the second time Conservatives have voted against such a motion. Last month, they obstructed efforts to transfer Bill C-254 to Liberal MP Sue Barnes (London West), a move necessary to get the Bill to the voting stage in the House of Commons. Both the Bloc and the NDP have previously indicated their support for this legislation, so if Bill C-254 actually got to a vote, it would undoubtedly pass. This would give women the same legal protection that other vulnerable groups have, but the Tories will not let the Bill get to a vote.

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¹ House of Commons Debates, Hansard, December 6, 2007

² *Harper government defeats bill to protect girls and women from violence*, Free Radical news release, April 22, 2007

Last May, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day said, "Canada will not be a safe haven for those who promote hatred".³ "That is clearly not true," says Valerie Smith, a Toronto activist who has worked for years to get this law changed. "Canada is most definitely a safe haven for those who promote hatred against the female half of the population, and the Conservatives seem determined to keep it that way."

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For further information, contact Valerie Smith valsmith@thefreeradical.ca, cell (647) 267-1783

About The Free Radical: The Free Radical web site 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 mistreatment 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.

NB: New web site URL: www.thefreeradical.ca and email: valsmith@thefreeradical.ca

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHANGE THE CRIMINAL CODE HATE PROPAGANDA LAW

Over the past 25 years, recommendations to amend the law to extend protection to women have been endorsed by:

- Canadian Teachers Federation (2007)
- Ontario Federation of Labour (2007)
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association media violence coalition (2007) which includes
 - 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
 - Ontario Student Trustees' Association
- James Flaherty, Attorney General of Ontario (2000)
- Michael Bryant, MPP, Ontario Liberal Party Attorney General Critic (2000)
- B'nai Brith League for Human Rights (1994)
- Raymond Hnatyshyn, Minister of Justice (1987)
- Law Reform Commission of Canada (1986)
- Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1985)
- Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (1985)
- National Action Committee on the Status of Women (1983)

For additional information on Bill C-254, visit the Hate Propaganda section at http://www.thefreeradical.ca/Hate_Propaganda.htm.

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³ *Black Panther leader stopped at border*, Globe and Mail, May 16, 2007