

MPs' panel urges ban on exploiting violence

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OTTAWA — A parliamentary committee wants Justice Minister Allan Rock to outlaw music, videos, comics and even computer bulletin boards that sensationalize cruelty, violence and horror.

The justice committee issued a majority report yesterday saying the obscenity provisions of the Criminal Code, which apply to publications and crime comics, need to be modernized to deal with new media that may be exploited to degrade human life or trivialize horror and pain.

The report was sparked by draft legislation proposed by Rock last spring to outlaw the importation and sale of crime cards and crime board games. Not yet widely available in Canada, the crime cards are

modelled after sports cards, but display the photographs of serial killers, rapists, sex abusers or mass murderers, and detail their crimes on the back.

Crime board games, which come in their own "body bags," challenge players to kill, as many people as possible in fictitious trips across the United States.

Liberal and Reform MPs on the committee said they were incredulous that such products are sold for profit and found the products "distasteful in the extreme." However, they said the cards and games are "only the tip of the iceberg."

So they rejected Rock's proposed legislation, calling instead for a much broader approach, aimed at banning all means of

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Committee of MPs wants Ottawa to ban exploiting of violence, horror

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communication which "exploit and glorify cruelty, horror and violence for no socially redeeming purpose." In particular, the MPs cited music, videos, comics, posters and computer bulletin boards.

And if the government agrees, the measures could even reach as far as violence on television, said committee vice-chairperson Sue Barnes.

But Liberal committee chairperson Warren Allmand, a former solicitor-general, has told the committee that he did not support the recommendations, Canadian Press reports.

Allmand said the proposal was too broad and would pose problems for journalists and artists.

"Where do you draw the line?" he asked.

The committee said expert witnesses testified that although a direct link has not been established between portrayals of violence in the media and real violence "it is generally

acknowledged to be a contributing factor."

"Glorifying murders and murderers as a form of entertainment both degrades human life and demeans and trivializes the loss and pain endured by victims of violent crime. As well, the committee is concerned with their possible negative impact on the attitudes and behavior of young people," the report said.

"Exploiting for profit the suffering of victims of serial killers and mass murderers, is, in its view, highly objectionable."

Three Bloc Québécois MPs on the committee dissented from the majority report, arguing that Parliament "should concentrate on real violence rather than on conjugal violence." The Bloc MPs argued that the committee had wasted too much time on "a social evil which in many ways appears to have been exaggerated."

However, the majority of the committee (four Liberals and two Reformers) said Section

163 of the Criminal Code should be amended to ban the undue exploitation or glorification of crime, horror, cruelty or violence.

"It is clear to the committee that the goods and material that are the object of this proposal have no redeeming cultural or social value. They could have a deleterious impact on Canadian society," the majority report said.

The MPs recommended a preamble setting out the social ill at which the legislation is directed, and the inclusion of safeguards in the law requiring the consent of the provincial attorneys-general to prevent frivolous or vexatious prosecutions.

As well, the committee says there may be occasions where it is legitimate to expose the public to horror or violence and recommends the law include special defences based on artistic merit, newsgathering, or participation in public controversy or debate.