



NEWS RELEASE

LIBERALS MUST DEMAND AMENDMENT TO BILL C-31 TO UPDATE HATE PROPAGANDA LAW

Toronto, Ontario, May 19, 2009: Last week, the Conservative government introduced Bill C-31, described as a “grab bag of changes to the *Criminal Code*”¹. The Bill contains 40 legislative amendments the government claims will “fill identified gaps in the law”. The government says the “proposed amendments... will help ensure that Canada’s laws will continue to protect Canadians”².

One identified gap in the law that would protect Canadians but is not included in Bill C-31, is a much-needed amendment to the hate propaganda section of the *Criminal Code* to expand the list of protected groups to include women. While ignoring this critical *Criminal Code* amendment, the Conservatives are including an amendment to the definition of prize fighting. This clearly demonstrates how skewed this government’s priorities are when it comes to “protecting” Canadians.

What this situation does provide, however, is an opportunity for the opposition parties to demand a change to Bill C-31 to include an amendment to the hate propaganda law to protect women. As this is a minority parliament, Bill C-31 can’t pass without opposition support. If the government does not add this amendment to their “grab bag” Bill, opposition parties can refuse to pass it.

It is particularly important for the Liberals to take action. During the last election campaign, the Liberal party promised to amend the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law to include protection for women. Their election policy document stated:

“While the Conservatives claim that law and order is their biggest priority, they have taken no real measures to combat violence against women. A new Liberal government’s efforts to fight this problem will begin with an amendment to the *Criminal Code* to include ‘gender’ in the hate propaganda provisions to help end societal acceptance for those who would incite hatred against women.” (*Richer, Fairer, Greener: An Action Plan for the 21st Century*, Liberal Party of Canada election platform, September 2008)

Currently, Section 319 of the *Criminal Code* prohibits the public incitement of hatred against a limited list of “identifiable groups”, those being set out in Section 318(4) as “any section of the public distinguished by colour, race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation”.

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¹ *Conservatives propose 40 amendments to Criminal Code*, National Post, May 16, 2009

² *Modernizing Criminal Procedure*, Department of Justice Canada Background, May 15, 2009

The public incitement of hatred is acknowledged to be a contributing factor in the promotion of violence and discrimination against the target group. Women are subjected to extraordinary levels of violence, and yet, for decades, politicians have refused to provide us with this basic and essential legal protection.

While the Liberal election promise was made by the previous party leader, Michael Ignatieff, the new Liberal leader, has a history as a human rights champion. For five years, he was Director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy. The Center's mission statement states:

"The Center uses its teaching capacity to inspire future leaders to make respect for human rights principles a central commitment of democratic leadership."

Now that Mr. Ignatieff actually holds an important position of leadership, we have every right to expect him to make women's human rights one of his central commitments. Pursuing an amendment to Bill C-31 is one step he can take. He must also maintain, as Liberal party policy, the promise to amend Section 318(4) to add women to the protected groups.

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About The Free Radical (www.thefreeradical.ca): 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 since 1990, 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.

For additional information on the exclusion of women from the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law, visit the Hate Propaganda and Bill C-254 sections on The Free Radical web site.

http://www.thefreeradical.ca/Women_and_Hate_Propaganda.htm

http://www.thefreeradical.ca/Bill_C-254_add_women_to_hate_propaganda_law.htm