



NEWS RELEASE

LIBERALS PROMISE TO INCLUDE WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CRIMINAL CODE HATE PROPAGANDA LAW

Toronto, Ontario, September 24, 2008: The federal Liberals are promising to change the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law to extend protection to women and girls. Under Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, the Liberals offered nothing but feeble excuses for not protecting women from the promotion of hate and violence. However, in the recently-released Liberal platform document, *Richer, Fairer, Greener: An Action Plan for the 21st Century*, they promise the following:

“A new Liberal government’s efforts to fight this problem [violence against women] 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.”

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”. The public incitement of hatred is illegal because it is acknowledged to be a contributing factor in the promotion of violence and discrimination against the target group. Women and girls are subjected to extraordinary levels of violence, and yet, for decades, politicians have excluded us from this basic legal protection.

This situation is particularly damaging to girls and young women who are, according to Statistics Canada, at greatest risk for sexual violence.¹ In addition, two recent studies carried out in Ontario schools, one conducted by Toronto’s School Community Safety Advisory Panel and the other by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, found that sexual harassment and sexual assault of girls are occurring at alarming rates.

“Changing the hate propaganda law will be a significant deterrent to those who promote violence and hatred against women and girls,” says Valerie Smith, a Toronto anti-violence activist who has worked for years to get this law changed. “The lack of legal protection has allowed misogynist expression to flourish virtually unchecked in Canada.”

Voters should note that over the past two years, the Conservatives under Stephen Harper have repeatedly blocked attempts by Liberal MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj to correct the situation with Bill C-254, his Private Member’s Bill that would amend the *Criminal Code* to add “sex” to the identified groups.

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¹ *Measuring Violence Against Women*, Statistical Trends 2006, Statistics Canada

The Liberals don't need a majority to make this legislative change happen. A minority Parliament similar to the previous one would be sufficient since the Bloc and NDP have both indicated support for this legislation in the past. This means the opposition parties could join together to pass a Bill to amend the law even without the support of the Conservatives. All that's required is the political will to make it happen.

And, if the Conservatives win a majority, we can kiss this legislative change good bye, the country will continue to be awash in misogynist expression, and the female half of the population will pay the price.

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.

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BACKGROUNDER

Free Radical federal election fact sheet, September 20, 2008

http://www.thefreeradical.ca/Federal_election_fact_sheet_Sept_20_2008.pdf

September 19, 2008 news release:

Liberal Platform Includes Wrzesnewskyj's Proposed Change to Hate Crimes Legislation

MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre)

http://www.thefreeradical.ca/NR_BW_Hate_Crimes_19_Sept_08.pdf

For more information on the exclusion of girls and women from hate crimes legislation, visit the Hate Propaganda and Bill C-254 sections on The Free Radical web site at www.thefreeradical.ca.

Links below provide information on the Ontario Public School Board's Association (OPSBA) Violence in the Media Coalition's efforts to convince the federal government to amend *Criminal Code* Section 318 to include girls and women in the public incitement of hatred laws.

March 6, 2008 news release:

Criminal Code omission endangers girls and women

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

<http://www.etfo.ca/MediaRoom/MediaReleases/Pages/Criminal%20Code%20Omission%20Endangers%20Girls%20and%20Women.aspx>

March 4, 2008

Open letter to The Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Stephane Dion, Jack Layton and Gilles Duceppe

Violence in the Media Coalition

<http://www.opsba.org/pubs/nrel/2008/2008-03-04.html>

May 2, 2007 news release:

Amended Criminal Code could address violence against women

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)

<http://www.oecta.on.ca/news/nr2007/nr070502.htm>

April 16, 2007 news release:

Protect girls and women from hate propaganda – media violence coalition calls for all party support

Violence in the Media Coalition

<http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/April2007/16/c5584.html>

April 16, 2007 letter to all federal MPs:

Your vote on Bill C-254 – protection for women

Violence in the Media Coalition

http://www.opsba.org/pubs/Position_Papers/Federal%20issues_billc_54_letter.pdf

January 17, 2007 news release:

Media violence – not a pretty picture

Violence in the Media Coalition

<http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/January2007/17/c6679.html>