



POLITICIANS must Punish *deadly* distributors

”The families would rather that there be no film, because they see it as highly exploitive and violating their daughters.”¹

Toronto, Ontario, March 27, 2005: An American company is completing their film based on the crimes committed in Ontario by Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. The film, *Deadly*, is reportedly now scheduled for a fall release and, according to the company’s website, “faithfully” recreates their “dance with death and depravity”.

Tim Danson, a Toronto lawyer representing the families of murder victims Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, told Canadian Press, “We’re aware they’ve hired two actresses to play the roles of French and Mahaffy and that they intend to simulate what occurred inside the Bernardo-Homolka home. When we destroyed the videotapes and other sensitive material – (the families) really did believe they had purged this evil – that their daughters were now free from further violation. The thought of a Hollywood production simulating what had happened to their daughters is something that’s excruciating and incomprehensible to them. We have no choice but to think the worst and we’ll have to act accordingly...”²

The film’s producer is, quite incredibly, promoting the movie as a vehicle for “predator awareness”. As the official movie website says, “One of the most important messages that ‘Deadly’ carries is that there are predators, even in the quietest, most unlikely places. Enhancing public awareness of the dangers posed by people like Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka is a specific goal of the production.”³ With girls being snatched out of their own beds or off the sidewalks of North American cities with heartbreaking regularity, just reading the newspaper – pick a day, any day – is sufficient to inform the public of the dangers posed by sex offenders.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said it’s “an unfortunate development for people to choose to capitalize on a terrible and horrific tragedy,”⁴ and he suggested that people boycott the movie, since the government has no legal means to stop it (unless it contravenes the *Criminal Code* child pornography law). Consumer and Business Services Minister Jim Watson said that *Deadly* should never be seen here. “I’d like to keep it out because I think it’s a despicable film.”⁵

Lions Gate Films – Producer/distributor of *American Psycho*, Paul Bernardo’s “Bible”

The film has not found a Canadian distributor yet, and there are those who believe this will be difficult. However, Vancouver-based Lions Gate Films has already produced and distributed a movie based on *American Psycho*, one of Paul Bernardo’s favourite books. Prosecutors attempted to introduce the book as evidence at his trial, saying he read it as his “bible”. The request was refused, as the judge felt the content of the book – which he described as violent, perverted and sick -- would have a significant prejudicial effect on the jury.⁶

In spite of protests from victims' groups, Lions Gate shot much of *American Psycho* in Toronto, and reveled in the notoriety and publicity. According to a London Free Press columnist, producing *Psycho* earned Lions Gate a "reputation as insensitive celluloid bottom-feeders who'll try to squeeze a buck out of anything..."⁷, so picking up *Deadly* for distribution would be no problem.

Action Politicians Can Take – Provincial and Federal

Politicians, both provincial and federal, can do more than suggest a boycott. They can warn Canadian film companies that they could be refused taxpayer subsidies if they pick up *Deadly* for distribution. The dollar figures involved in the film subsidy system are significant. For instance, Lions Gate Films and its predecessor Cinepix Films received \$59.3 million in government funding up to 1999. Not content with that, Lions Gate applied for tax credits for *American Psycho* and, astonishingly, the federal government granted them \$120,000.

Mark Genuis, president of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education in Calgary, called the situation obscene, insulting and destructive. "They take copious percentages of families' hard-earned income, and instead of saying to parents... keep the money, and build healthy, happy, productive, contributing children, the government says, 'We'll take the money and teach your children how to kill and rape.'⁸ Well said, and time for it to stop.

It's nice to think that enough Canadians would boycott the film to make it a financial failure, but the sad fact is that many people lined up to watch the actual trial of Paul Bernardo, so urging a movie boycott is not a particularly realistic or effective suggestion. Politicians have more power than that. They know it, and they should use it.



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For further information, contact Valerie Smith at valsmith@fradical.com or visit the American Psycho section (under Movies) on the Free Radical web site at www.fradical.com. For information on Canadian taxpayer funding of violent film and television, see Chapter 15 in the *Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada* posted on the site.

¹ Tim Danson, quoted in *Boycott of Bernardo film urged*, Toronto Star, March 24, 2005

² *Lawyer demands advance viewing of Bernardo-Homolka movie*, Globe and Mail, March 23, 2005

³ The Official Motion Picture Website for "Deadly", March 25, 2005

⁴ *Shun film on killers: Preem*, Toronto Sun, March 24, 2005

⁵ *Boycott of Bernardo film urged*, Toronto Star, March 24, 2005

⁶ *Life imitates 'art' in Bernardo 'bible'*, Toronto Sun, September 1, 1995

⁷ *Dogma's downright disgusting*, London Free Press, September 15, 1999

⁸ *American Psycho tax credit riles pro-family groups*, Calgary Herald, April 13, 2000