

# Censoring art shouldn't fit the Bill

The Income Tax Act will let the government subjectively harm film and television



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A&E  
Commentary

Nothing gets Stephen Harper hot and bothered like a reduction of government spending, and there's nothing he and his party are more violent to than "useless" social spending.

The Harper government's Income Tax Act—also known as Bill C-10—is an underhanded attempt at limiting the freedom of speech for Canadian filmmakers. A clause buried in the 600-page bill currently awaiting a Senate vote would have tax credits revoked for content deemed to be graphically sexual or violent by a panel chosen by the Minister of Heritage, Josée Verner. This is nothing more than an ill-conceived attempt by the Conservative party to impose moral standards on the rest of the country.

Those in support of these new funding restraints have mentioned a new Canadian film called *Young People Fucking*, or "effing," as the prudish types like to say. Leaders of groups like the Canada Family Action Coalition have said that films involving young people doing said act don't follow their "Judeo-Christian moral principles." They claim that funding movies that don't follow their values is an outright abuse of their tax dollars.

This is a ridiculous position to take.

If they want to see movies that follow their values, what could we expect to be watching on our screens, *Chastity: The Movie*? There's absolutely nothing wrong with allowing movies that depict immoral behavior to be made. If Christians want to promote their values, they should use film as a starting point for discussion. They could talk about the problems of teen sex within the context of *Juno* or bring up the Christian way of doing business by drawing comparisons from *There Will Be Blood*.

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We're not going to be able raise any serious ethical questions with movies if we're only turning out movies that look like *Veggie Tales* or some teen-rated after-school special.

I also take offence with the idea that we can only watch movies with content that we find to be moral. As a Stanley Kubrick fan, I'm really insulted by this idea. Simply because I believe that *A Clockwork Orange* is an excellent film, it doesn't mean that I idolize Alex DeLarge or spend my evenings participating in ultra-violent behavior. I enjoy this film for a number of reasons, such as the

difficult questions it poses about justice and free will and the great cinematography and gnarly soundtrack. Extreme violence and immoral sex acts that happen onscreen are valuable for stimulating thought on these problems without having to let these things happen to real people.

The logistics for enforcing this law are also going to be problematic. If bureaucrats in the Heritage Department are to view these films after they are finished, revoking tax credits will amount to what is essentially a fine. The definitions of what sex and violence are "graphic" and "offensive" are completely subjective things. War movies and heterosexual sex would likely be given more lenience, and that's a value judgment that the government shouldn't be making.

If they took a more rule-based approach like disallowing genitalia from being shown, a movie containing childbirth would invariably end up losing its funding. The only thing this law will do is discourage film producers from picking up movies with certain content out of fear that their investment will have its tax credits withheld.

The Canadian film industry is small, and provocative filmmakers like David Cronenberg don't deserve to be censored. Harper and Verner need to allow our struggling artists to work with enough money to flourish and shouldn't think that writers and directors owe us some sort of moral sheepishness just because they're making movies funded by the public purse.

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