

SE News
HD Canada blocks The Satanic Verses One major bookseller halts sales, another will not
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Revenue Canada officials stopped further imports of The Satanic Verses at the border yesterday pending a review of the book for possible hate propaganda after a letter addressed to the Prime Minister from an Ottawa- based Moslem association was passed on to them for action.

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Linda Murphy, acting director of prohibited importations for Revenue Canada, said one of her five appraisers will read the novel to determine whether it infringes on the hate propaganda provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada. She said the letter was passed from the PMO to Revenue Minister Otto Jelinek's office and on to her department.

Justin de Beaucamp, a spokesman for the Prime Minister, said that after a thorough search the PMO was unable to find the original letter and "doubts very much that it was ever received."

Mr. Jelinek's office was referring all queries down the line to Ms Murphy's office.

Margaret Gillis, acting manager of the prohibited importations unit, who saw the letter, says the complaint is being handled no differently from any other complaint about a book being hate propaganda.

Coles Book Stores Ltd. , one of Canada's largest booksellers, removed the book from its 198 stores across the country yesterday, saying it was concerned about the safety of its 1,850 employees.

"The book is not available at any Coles store in the country. This difficult decision was made in the interest of employees' safety," the Toronto-based company said in a statement.

Nigel Berrisford, vice-president of book marketing at W. H. Smith Canada Ltd., said that his company ordered 1,200 books and that most stores are sold out.

"The second we get more, we'll be putting them into the stores, he said.

W. H. Smith spokesman Bruce Reid said: "While W. H. Smith appreciates that this novel has caused offence to certain religious groups, our company policy is to make available to our customers books which they wish to purchase and which contravene no Canadian laws."

Revenue Canada reviews about 4,000 books and publications a year for violations of the Criminal Code dealing mostly with hate propaganda, obscenity and sedition.

"We've alerted our ports that if they see the book, it should be detained for review," said Sheila Batchelor, Revenue Canada assistant deputy minister. But she added that it is unlikely it would constitute hate propaganda per se.

Ms Murphy said she cannot say whether it is hate propaganda until it has been reviewed by an appraiser.

Revenue Canada does not have the power to go to bookstores and strip books off the shelf to review them. It can only act against publications being brought into the country.

"So we simply Telexed all our regional offices asking them that if there is another importation attempt of this book, would they please detain it and send us a copy right away so it can be reviewed by my office here in Ottawa and we can make a decision as to whether it should be prohibited or released, Ms Murphy said. She said she has no idea whether the publisher, Penguin Books Canada Ltd., is planning to order another shipment.

At Penguin Books, cautious receptionists were taking down the telephone number of anyone who called and referring them to Penguin lawyers. The lawyers did not return calls. Islamic fundamentalists in Iran and other countries have denounced the book as blasphemous and threatened to kill author Salman Rushdie and officials of Penguin Books in London.

Penguin Books Canada Ltd. has hired security guards to protect their corporate office and warehouse in Markham, near Toronto.

Earlier this week, Waldenbooks, the largest bookseller in the United States, ordered copies of the book removed from the shelves of its 1,200 stores.

Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, the spiritual leader of Iran, placed a \$3- million bounty on the head of the author.

Iran's charge d'affaires in Ottawa, Mohammad Ali Mousavi, was telephoned Thursday by External Affairs and "Canada expressed its concern" about threats against Mr. Rushdie, said Rejanne Dodd, a spokesman for the department.

No threat of any kind had been received by any Canadian mission and Iran has not protested against the importation or sale of the book in Canada, she said.

Ms Murphy rejected a suggestion that Revenue Canada was ordering the book's detention to appease the ayatollah. "That is inaccurate," she said. The only reason shipments of the book were not ordered detained before was that no complaint had been received by the prohibitions directorate.

The final decision is made by the deputy minister, although the importer is allowed to appeal the decision in the courts.

Ms Murphy said hers is "a very small group" of four or five people who read the books. None is trained in Islamic studies. "We'll do the very best we can do," she said.

Said Mounib, president of the Ottawa Muslim Association, said he is glad Revenue Canada is reviewing the book but he hopes that the people chosen will be "a learned committee, neutral and fair."

They do not necessarily have to be Moslem, he said, but they should know something about the subject and about Moslem culture.