

Tommy Douglas miniseries pulled without consulting screenwriter Writers Guild of Canada asks CBC to issue apology to screenwriter

For immediate release

June 26, 2006 – The CBC pulled its two-part miniseries on Tommy Douglas, *Prairie Giant*, from circulation and halted DVD sales without talking to screenwriter Bruce Smith about the historical accuracy of his script.

“The CBC has not contacted me, the director, or my research colleague to find out how much research we did for the script, and to let us counter the accusations made by the Gardiner family,” says Smith, who is currently working on a script for a miniseries based on Steven Truscott.

Smith worked full-time for two years on the *Prairie Giant* script with a doctoral-student researcher and expert on Tommy Douglas and Jimmy Gardiner. Along the way Smith spent hundreds of hours in archives and libraries researching the history of the period, read more than 30 books covering Douglas, Gardiner and numerous other political figures of the time, as well as a slew of newspaper articles, and conducted dozens of interviews with people who knew both men.

“I stand by my portrayal of Jimmy Gardiner without reservation,” says Smith. “It is historically accurate and based on extensive research.”

Smith found out from watching television that the CBC had hired an independent historian to assess his portrayal of Gardiner. The historian concluded that Smith hadn’t done enough research – even though he never contacted Smith to actually find out what research was done.

“The CBC’s behaviour is inexcusable,” says Maureen Parker, Executive Director of the Writers Guild of Canada. “We ask that they review the facts, and issue a public apology.”

Besides damaging Smith’s reputation, the CBC has set a dangerous precedent for all screenwriters who write scripts based on true-life events, Parker adds.

“Screenwriters must be given dramatic licence to take historical events and put them into television form,” says Parker. “A professional, experienced screenwriter like Bruce knows where he has to condense events to tell a compelling and entertaining story, while still staying true to the facts.”

After CBC announced it was pulling the plug on the miniseries, Smith finally had a chance to read the historian’s assessment of his script. “I can counter every one of the arguments made against my script,” says Smith.

“Gardiner was a controversial figure and we knew all along some people would complain. We were always ready to defend ourselves, but we never got the chance. This is outright censorship.”

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