



Via Fax (416) 205-6980 and Email

September 5, 2006

Richard Stursberg
Executive Vice President
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
205 Wellington St. West
Toronto ON M5V 3G7

Re: **Prairie Giant – the Tommy Douglas Story**

Dear Richard:

It is ironic to be writing to you to urge you to reconsider your decision not to rebroadcast the mini-series, “Prairie-Giant” given that it has just been nominated for nine Geminis, including one for “best screenplay.” With such a commendable drama one would expect the CBC would be doing its utmost to share it with the Canadian public who paid for it, not refusing to air it.

You will find attached to this letter one from WGC President Rebecca Schechter to Guy Fournier, Chair of the CBC’s Board of Directors. In it our President asks that the CBC publicly release the historian’s report which led to the decision to ban the mini-series so that the screenwriter, Bruce Smith, has a chance to assess the historian’s conclusions. The letter also suggests that if the CBC is so concerned about historical inaccuracies in this drama that it conduct a new and transparent assessment of “Prairie Giant” to make sure the process is fair to everyone involved in this production. Unfortunately, Mr. Fournier has decided that he is in a conflict of interest as he is a member of the WGC and therefore unable to comment on the matter. So I’m asking on behalf of our members that you please respond to our President’s correspondence. And simply stating that this is producer Kevin Dewalt’s problem will not suffice.

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Richard, this matter isn't simply going to go away. We can't allow a private individual's political agenda to dictate what programs are seen on our public broadcaster. Nor are we prepared as a professional guild to allow our members' craft to be assailed by someone with no knowledge of dramatic writing and certainly not without a fair trial.

We would greatly appreciate a prompt response to our concerns.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maureen Parker', with a stylized, cursive script.

Maureen Parker
Executive Director

cc: Bruce Smith
WGC Council
CBC Board of Directors
Robert Rabinovitch, President, CBC
Kevin DeWalt, President & CEO, Minds Eye Pictures

/Attachment



Via facsimile (450) 379-9514 and email

July 14, 2006

Guy Fournier, C.M.
Chair, Board of Directors
CBC/Radio-Canada
CP 330
St-Paul D'Abbotsford, Quebec
J0E 1A0

Dear Guy,

Re: Prairie Giant: The Tommy Douglas Story

I am writing as President of the Writers Guild of Canada on behalf of English Canada's screenwriters to raise some troubling issues that have arisen recently in connection with CBC's production, "Prairie Giant: the Tommy Douglas Story."

First, I am deeply concerned about the process of evaluation of the mini-series. CBC responded to complaints from the Gardiner family with total disregard for anything but what appears to be fear of political repercussions or fear of litigation from Gardiner's heirs. CBC brought in a historian to judge a work that was researched for two years by screenwriter Bruce Smith, without asking this judge to refer in any way to the research that was done. In fact, Bruce and his researcher went beyond the accepted historical record by conducting interviews with primary sources. This is like asking a jury to reach a verdict in a criminal trial solely on the conclusions of a coroner's report, without giving them the opportunity to discover how those conclusions were reached.

Of course, judging a TV mini-series isn't the same as judging a person in court, but as an organization accountable to all Canadians, CBC should have conducted the "trial" of Prairie Giant with much greater transparency and fairness.

My second concern is the verdict itself. CBC's anonymous assessor stated that Prairie Giant's depiction of Saskatchewan Premier Jimmy Gardiner did not agree with the "accepted historical record." The CBC accepted his judgment and removed the drama from circulation. The implications of this verdict go beyond any single program, right to the heart of the CBC's mandate.

Isn't the reason people are interested in historical dramas because they delve beneath the surface of "accepted" history, because they give us insights that we can't get by simply reading or watching "the official story?" Every piece of art that bases itself on history takes dramatic license with the facts in order, we hope, to illuminate a more profound truth. As writers and artists, that's why we take on such projects. As viewers, that's what we expect

our public broadcaster to give us: intelligent, well-crafted programs that reflect Canadian realities, past and present, in new, unexpected, un-“accepted” ways.

If the assessment of Prairie Giant is allowed to stand, it will cast a long and chilling shadow over the screenplays written by every writer working on CBC programs. I fear that it will also diminish the relevance of the public broadcaster to Canadians in a catastrophic way – catastrophic for the CBC, for its audience and for the creators who value its presence in our media landscape.

As a first step we ask the CBC to please identify the anonymous historian and publicly release his report. We also request that the CBC conduct a new, transparent assessment of Prairie Giant to make sure that the process is fair. Otherwise what has transpired to date becomes official CBC policy and we will have to inform our members that the CBC is only interested in “official” versions of Canadian history. The CBC needs to step forward and make a public commitment to broadcasting stories about our past without fear of censorship.

We hope to hear from you as soon as possible.

Regards,



Rebecca Schechter
President
Writers Guild of Canada

c.c. Maureen Parker, Executive Director, Writers Guild of Canada
Robert Rabinovitch, President and CEO, CBC/Radio-Canada
Richard Stursberg, Executive Vice-President, CBC Television
Johanne Brunet, CGA, MBA, Ph.D., CBC Board of Directors
Bernd Christmas, CBC Board of Directors
Hélène F. Fortin, CA, CBC Board of Directors
Peter Herrndorf, CBC Board of Directors
Jasmin Jivraj, CBC Board of Directors
Nezhat Khosrowshahi, CBC Board of Directors
Howard McNutt, CBC Board of Directors
Trina McQueen, CBC Board of Directors
K. (Rai) Sahi, CBC Board of Directors
Kevin DeWalt, Chairman and CEO, Minds Eye Pictures
Bruce Smith, Screenwriter
John N. Smith, Director