

Bill Rea ? Let Bernardo write

Public opinion is something that's very important in what is supposed to be a free society, but it worries me sometimes too. We're hearing a lot of public input into the fact that notorious murderer and rapist Paul Bernardo has written a novel that was for sale on Amazon.

There were a lot of people calling for the book to be taken off the Amazon website. Indeed, Newstalk 1010 (CFRB) set up a petition calling on Amazon to drop the book. As of Saturday morning, the petition had attracted more than 62,000 signatures.

I was upset Sunday evening when I learned Amazon had apparently taken the book down.

For the record, I did not sign the petition. In fact, I'm disappointed that a journalistic outlet that I have followed and respected all my life would call for the suppression of written words simply because the people in charge there don't like the author.

I don't like the author either. Paul Bernardo is repulsive. He abducted, assaulted and murdered two innocent young ladies, dismembering one of them, and caused the death of another through disgusting acts. And he also attacked and assaulted many other women. He has been declared a dangerous offender. Chances are excellent he will die in prison, which is fine with me. I guess there is an outside chance that he might get paroled at some point, but only when he's a very old man, on or near his deathbed. Therefore, Bernardo, who's in his early 50s, can look forward to at least another 25 years in his current accommodations, assuming his health holds out.

I have no plans to read his book, entitled *A MAD World Order*, although that could change, depending on public reaction to this work of fiction, and not the guy who wrote it.

While I have extremely limited use for Bernardo or people like him, I have no trouble with him writing. The man is serving a well-deserved life sentence for his crimes, which means he's got a lot of time on his hands. If he wants to devote some of that time to writing, then let him. As long as his work is not in itself illegal (child pornography, etc.) or he's not trying to give himself a literary pat on the back for the acts that resulted in his incarceration, then I'm okay with it. And if people want to read his words, that's fine with me too. I don't believe we have, or should have, the right to tell our fellow citizens what they can or cannot read, based on public perception of the writer.

And from what I've read, the book was attracting a lot of attention. It was the top item on Amazon's Movers and Shakers list before it came down. That's hardly a surprise. People are still very interested in Bernardo.

I was fully expecting to see Bernardo's mug on the front page of Friday's Toronto Sun, and was not disappointed. Indeed, I would have been floored had I not seen it.

I would be curious how many of those more than 62,000 who signed that petition have also bought the book online. I'm sure a lot of them have, or would have.

According to what I've read so far, the book involves international political intrigue; sort of the works that a lot of other authors have produced over the years. Many of them have been best-sellers. There have been concerns that Bernardo's book depicts certain violent acts. Read Frederick Forsyth's *The Dogs of War*, and you'll get accounts of the protagonists doing some pretty gruesome things.

I'm not saying Bernardo's work would be of the same quality, but the fact is I don't know. And from what I gather from the various commentators I have heard and read, I'm in pretty good company. Relatively few people have read this book, although it appears it was available on Amazon for some months. Yet, it is clear there are many people who want to make sure I never find out how good or bad it is.

But just because the guy is rubbish doesn't necessarily mean Bernardo's writings should be banned. There are evil people whose writings are obtainable today. For example, I believe it would be relatively easy to get a copy of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's autobiographical manifesto. Incidentally, like *A MAD World Order*, *Mein Kampf* was started in prison.

The Caledon Public Library does not currently have a copy of *Mein Kampf* in its collection (I asked). But I was also told they could obtain one for me, if I wanted it (I don't).

But the matter does raise questions of perspective, as I reflect that there are people who would seek to ban Bernardo's writings.

According to public documentation, he is responsible for the deaths of three people. Hitler is responsible for the deaths of millions, yet I'm not aware of any move to ban *Mein Kampf*. I have read that Chapters/Indigo has elected not to carry the work, but that is their decision, and as I have learned, the book is still obtainable elsewhere.

About 40 years ago, as I was studying the Second World War in high school history class, Hitler's rise to power was discussed, and the fact he set his plans out in *Mein Kampf* was mentioned. I remember, on an impulse, asking the teacher if copies of *Mein Kampf* could be obtained. He seemed almost surprised at the question, assuring me it was in the school library, and I should read it if I was

interested.

I never did, but I always felt a certain satisfaction that I could if I chose to.

There have been views expressed about the fact that there is money involved with this book. Amazon stood to make money, and since it's a business, what else is to be expected? Bernardo would be in line for some money too. There are restrictions against convicted criminals profiting from the crimes they have committed. But if the accounts I have read so far are true, this book has nothing to do with the wrong he did. Assuming that's the case, does that mean there could have been money coming his way? A lot of people suspect that, and I believe that's behind a lot of the effort to send the book on its way into oblivion. They don't want him getting any money.

But think about that for a minute. Even if Bernardo realizes a potful of scratch from his writings, what's he going to do with it?

The guy's doing life in prison. He's not about to go out and buy a nice new car, or accentuate his wardrobe, or redecorate his current lodgings, or take an exotic trip to the French Riviera. The money is a big irrelevancy.

The book by Bernardo might be a piece of literary trash, or it might turn out to be a great read. Very few of us are currently in a position to know, but I firmly believe we all have the right to decide for ourselves.

To that end, I regret Amazon stopped making the book available. And to hell with that petition. Let the rest of us make up our own minds.

