

Michael Moore loses appeal against R rating for *Fahrenheit 9/11*

Joanne Laurier
24 June 2004

US filmmaker Michael Moore and the distributors of his film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, have lost an appeal to overturn its “R” rating, which restricts young moviegoers’ ability to see the film.

On Tuesday the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the industry body that screens films and determines their suitability for various audiences, refused to lower the rating to “PG-13,” which would allow youth under 17 to attend movie screenings without a parent or guardian.

“I encourage all teenagers to come see my movie, by any means necessary. If you need me to sneak you in, let me know,” was Moore’s response to the decision.

Lions Gates Films president Tom Ortenberg, whose company is releasing the film together with IFC Films and Bob and Harvey Weinstein’s Fellowship Adventure Group, had argued at the appeals board hearing that 15- and 16-year-olds should be free to see the film on their own as they could end up in the military service in Iraq within the next few years.

“The images in the film are no more disturbing than what we have been seeing and frankly, should be seeing on network news since the Vietnam war...

“I hope the ‘R’ rating doesn’t have a large impact on the box office. I’ve spoken with many parents, including some on the appeals board, who absolutely said they are going to take their children to see the film. We’ll just have to hope the teenagers we’re encouraging to see this picture find their way in through parents or adult guardians,” said Ortenberg.

Jonathan Sehring, president of IFC Films, commented that the “R” rating could reduce the film’s box office revenues by 10 to 20 percent. He had hoped that the appeals board “would step back and see the bigger picture and importance of this film, and one of the key audiences that this film should be seen by.” Sehring

continued, “Some of the images are disturbing, but in a year or two, if kids are off to war, they’re going to be faced with those disturbing images for real.”

“As anyone who has read a paper, watched TV, surfed the Web or chatted by a water cooler this week can attest, the interest in *Fahrenheit 9/11* has grown to mammoth proportions. It is a shame that *Fahrenheit 9/11* will become inaccessible to a segment of the American population to whom this film has a great deal of relevance,” said Sehring.

The MPAA had barred former New York Democratic governor Mario Cuomo—hired by the distributors to represent the film’s rating challenge—from appearing at the hearing. According to the MPAA, Cuomo could not take part in the proceedings because only those associated with the film can make an appeal.

In a letter to Ortenberg and Sehring written on Monday, Cuomo said that he was “surprised and disappointed by the MPAA’s decision to prevent [him] from arguing [the] appeal in person...[MPAA ratings board chair Joan Graves] informed us that the (R) rating was based on: the use of the term ‘mother——’ by an American soldier, twice in repeating the words of a favorite song of the American soldiers in Iraq, and then twice again in his conversation immediately following the description of the song. Later in the film, there are several graphic images of victims of war and abusive behavior by some of our troops. Altogether the hard language and graphic pictures consume about three minutes in a film lasting 120 minutes.”

Cuomo’s letter further revealed that the distributors had rejected an MPAA offer of a “PG-13” rating in exchange for deleting “the few minutes of material.” According to Reuters, Cuomo questioned why fantasy films with graphic violence, like *Lord of the Rings*, were rated “PG-13,” while films like *Fahrenheit 9/11*,

with real war images, were rated “R.”

Fahrenheit 9/11, which is harshly critical of the Bush administration’s response to the September 11 terrorist attacks and its foreign policy in general, has provoked great interest and anticipation. The notion that a critical view of the Iraq war and the American political establishment might actually reach a wide audience in the US is driving extreme right-wing elements, like Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly and former “left” Christopher Hitchens, to the verge of hysteria.

Right-wing threats against Moore’s film have forced some cinemas to hire security guards for the film’s nationwide opening June 25. A Republican front group, Move America Forward [which boasts that its organizers were responsible for pressuring CBS into dropping the miniseries, “The Reagans”], issued a press release that asked “Americans to contact movie theater executives to voice their displeasure towards movie theaters promoting a political advertisement that defames our military, insults our troops and attempts to undermine the public’s support for the War on Terror.”

The press release goes on to cite the provocative comments of right-wing radio talk-show host Melanie Morgan: “It would be more appropriate to have it shown at Al Qaeda training camps rather than American movie theaters.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact