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## CANADIAN AUTHOR CENSORED AND DEEMED A SECURITY RISK BY CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

### University Risk Assessment Committee Revokes Approval for September 11 (5th anniversary) Reading of Canadian Novel, *North of 9/11*.

On September 11, 2006 author, David Bernans (who is also a Concordia graduate student, a former part-time Concordia Political Science professor, a recent Concordia Graduate Student Association president) planned a Concordia University reading from his historical novel, *North of 9/11* (Cumulus Press, 2006). The event was approved then later revoked by University security, deeming Bernans a security risk.

David Cozac of **PEN Canada**, an international association formed in 1926 to defend freedom of expression and raise awareness of that right, is quoted in Concordia University Student Newspaper, *The Link*, as stating, "It seems to us at this point that [Bernans] is being silenced. The University hasn't come out clearly as to why the event was cancelled."

The fictional plot of *North of 9/11* is set against the backdrop of actual events at Concordia University in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks as seen from the perspective of student characters active in anti-war politics and Palestinian solidarity organizing.

As a member of the University community, Bernans wants to read from his novel and share his thoughts about the five years Concordians have lived through since September 11, 2001. The reading event failed a risk assessment by Concordia's Risk Assessment Committee, headed by Vice President Services, Michael Di Grappa.

On June 13, 2006, Bernans filed the room-booking request for September 11, 2006. On July 20, he was sent an email informing him that security had approved the event. Four days later, Bernans received another email informing him that security had changed its mind and denied approval for the event (no reason was given). Apparently, a risk assessment had been done over the weekend to see what risks were involved in students and faculty hearing readings from a novel about 9/11.

There is a growing public campaign in support of Bernans. The University's **Graduate Students Association** has passed a motion in support of Bernans' freedom of speech and is calling for a review of the Risk Assessment Committee's procedures, and for a seat on that Committee. York University professor, David Noble, has said that by officially blocking Bernans' scheduled Fall reading, "the university, already an embarrassment of academic servility, has dramatized both the power of art and its own fear of that power. Another proud victory of art over authority. Bravo Bernans!"

Bernans still hopes to hold the event at Concordia and seeks to raise awareness about other draconian constraints on freedom of speech at the University. The event has recently been included in the McGill Public Interest Research Group's September 11 memorial: 9/11 - 5 YEARS AFTER on the McGill University campus.

An excerpt from **North of 9/11** (chapter 2: September 11, 2001) is available online at [http://www.cumuluspress.com/pdf.files/9-11\\_chap2.pdf](http://www.cumuluspress.com/pdf.files/9-11_chap2.pdf).

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