

Time Warner

Reaction to Ice-T Song Heats Up

60 Congressmen Join Complaint

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Federal and local officials have joined the chorus of outrage against corporate giant Time Warner Inc., which refuses to stop selling the song "Cop Killer" by rapper-actor Ice-T.

Sixty members of Congress signed a letter expressing "our deep sense of outrage" over Time Warner's decision to continue distribution of Ice-T's "Body Count" album, the target of a growing boycott campaign by police. Congressmen who lent their name to the letter included Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and House Minority Leader Bob Michel. Only three Democrats were among the signers.

In the letter to Time Warner Vice President Jeanette Lerman, the representatives roundly criticized the company, calling the lyrics "despicable" and "vile." The "Cop Killer" song includes the chorus "Die pigs die."

"It appears you have chosen potential profit over any reasonable sense of public responsibility," the cong-

See ICE-T, C3, Col. 1



REUTER

Ice-T, whose song "Cop Killer" has provoked a boycott.

Boycott

ICE-T, From C1

ressmen wrote. "We believe that your decision to disseminate these despicable lyrics advocating the murder of police officers is unconscionable."

Sales of the album have doubled since last week's original boycott calls. The album, released in March, has sold 410,000 copies and is currently ranked 62nd on Billboard magazine's list of the top 200 pop albums. Next week the album moves to No. 49 on the charts—with a bullet.

Controversy over the recording also reached the Northern Virginia suburb of Prince William County, where the chief prosecutor asked for a "voluntary boycott" of the recording after determining that he could not ban it.

In a news release, Commonwealth's Attorney Paul B. Ebert asked record stores to pull the album. He also asked residents to boycott stores that keep selling it.

"I realize we all have certain rights under the First Amendment to the Constitution; however, the lyrics in this song amount to advocating the killing of police officers and come very close to the criminal act of soliciting for the commission of a felony," Ebert said. "I see no difference in this and advocating the killing of a government official or specific groups, such as blacks, Nazis or any other identifiable group."

Yesterday marked the second instance the longtime prosecutor has thrown himself into the middle of a music industry controversy. Two years ago, he ordered record stores to restrict sales of 2 Live Crew's "As Nasty as They Wanna Be" to minors by keeping the recording behind counters after the group was prosecuted on Florida obscenity statutes.

"Cop Killer," the most widely known song on the Sire Records album, first came under fire earlier this month

when the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas (CLEAT) called for a boycott of Time Warner for distributing it. Nationwide, three record store chains have pulled the album.

The Fraternal Order of Police has asked all of its 2,000 lodges to join its boycott of Time Warner (FOP lodges in Prince George's and Montgomery counties have agreed). On Tuesday, the Los Angeles City Council requested that Time Warner and retailers voluntarily remove "Cop Killer" from stores in the greater Los Angeles area, adding a concern for the "lack of social responsibility that promotion of this recording indicated in the wake of the riots in Los Angeles."

Ice-T, who played a police officer in the film "New Jack City," has denied the song advocates murdering police. But critics point to the lyrics: "I got my black shirt on. I got my black gloves on. I got my ski mask on . . . I got my 12-gauge sawed off. I got my headlights turned off. I'm 'bout to bust some shots off. I'm 'bout to dust some cops off." Besides "Cop Killer," the album features another song about killing a police officer called "Smoked Pork," as well as one titled "Momma's Gotta Die Tonight."

Ironically, although "Cop Killer" has been lumped with other expressions of rap rage, the album is Ice-T's foray into heavy metal. The lyrics are screamed, not rapped.

Among the products and companies police were urged to boycott are Time, Sports Illustrated and People magazines, the Book-of-the-Month Club, Six Flags theme parks and three cable TV networks, HBO, CNN and Black Entertainment. Time Warner also owns Warner Bros.—which has a mega-hit with "Batman Returns"—Lorimar Pictures and Atlantic Records.

In a statement issued from its New York headquarters yesterday, Time Warner said it "continues to stand by [our] commitment to freedom of expression. It is not a matter of profits, but principle."

And in a Wall Street Journal Op-Ed page piece, Time Warner President Gerald M. Levin vowed that his company "won't retreat in the face of threats of boycotts or political grandstanding. . . . Cutting and running . . . would be a destructive precedent."

"Cop Killer," Levin wrote, does not "advocate an assault by black street kids on the police. It doesn't incite or glorify violence." Rather, the song is an "artist's rap on how a person in the street feels. . . . It's a shout of pain and protest," and "raw with rage and resentment."

But Gingrich said yesterday that "there is a point where explicit advocacy of direct violence is simply socially unsustainable. To apply the Bill Clinton test, imagine the same song [by] a white supremacist group about homosexuals or blacks: The outcry would be overwhelming. It would be the cover of Time attacking it as vicious rather than a defensive letter by Time Warner as to why it's necessary."

Even some police officers disagree that the song promotes violence toward police. Alexandria Police Officer Mark Bergin pointed out that it is nothing new for singers to herald violence toward police. He cited as examples an Irish bar ditty called "The Wild Colonial Boy," in which a "cop killer and thief" is the hero, and the 1989 recording by Lou Reed called "Romeo Had Juliet," which includes the line, "This cop who died in Harlem you'd think they'd get the warning I was dancing when his brains ran down on the street."

Rappers have long contended that racism plays a part in criticism of rap music, with its graphic images of violence and sex. Jon Cummings of the American Civil Liberties Union Arts Censorship Project said rap draws fire for violent lyrics "because it doesn't get the same respect" that other music forms do.

Staff writers Richard Harrington, Carlos Sanchez, Retha Hill and Paul Duggan contributed to this story.