

~~CENSORED~~

# NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

# N C R O P A

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The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

NO/DAW/DP

2nd November, 1981.

Mayor Edward Koch,  
The Gracie Mansion,  
Carl Schurz Park,  
East End Avenue & 90th Street,  
New York, N.Y.,  
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Koch,

I have recently returned from my fifth visit to the U.S.A. That four of my five visits have been exclusively to New York City will be clear indication enough of the attraction it has for me and the affection I have for it. I love New York, above everything, for the diversity of pursuits and entertainments it embraces and for its freedom and tolerance. Imagine my astonishment, therefore, when, having just taken my seat at a well-known gay theatre in midtown Manhattan at approximately 11 p.m. on Saturday, 19th September, the police burst in and stopped the performance, subsequently arresting five performers who were led away chained together, whilst I was talking to the box-office manager.

My own astonishment was also shared by many New Yorkers with whom I later discussed the incident, who assured me that this sort of thing had not happened for years. They had, in general, two possible explanations. One was the imminence of the mayoral election and the other perhaps as a reprisal for non-payment of "dropsy" to the police. My information is that you have a well-deserved reputation for being a most liberal and tolerant mayor (firmly endorsed by an article about you in today's "The Guardian" newspaper by Terry Coleman, in which he quotes you as saying "Look, I've always been for reform, always a liberal") and that the implication of the first explanation is, at best, most unlikely and, at worst, somewhat mischievous. The implications of the second are much more sinister but again, I find them hard to accept since the United States in general and New York City in particular, are not, thankfully, subjected to the ridiculously out-moded, repressive kind of censorship legislation which the people of the United Kingdom are forced to endure. I am, of course, aware that you do have obscenity laws in your country and I have, indeed, been well-briefed on the situation by the United States First Amendment Lawyers' Association, with whom I have close contact. However, I fail to understand why this particular raid was carried out which was surely an infringement of the civil rights of consenting American adults and gross interference with individual liberty, which the U.S.A., above all other countries, holds so dear. That is certainly something I had not expected to encounter in yours, of all cities. Indeed, when asked the purpose of my visit by customs and immigration on arrival at Kennedy Airport I had replied "To perceive freedom and, hopefully

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enjoy it".

I don't think it is generally appreciated in your country that the long espoused concept of the United Kingdom as the "Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free" is very much a myth, certainly with regard to its puritannical, although often hypocritical, attitude to matters of censorship. It is an incontrovertible fact that the U.K. now has more censorship than virtually any other country of the so-called "free" Western World. The National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (N.C.R.O.P.A.), which I founded in April 1976 and have been running ever since, was set up to fight for drastic, comprehensive reforms of our draconian censorship laws which would allow the British people the freedom to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear. The intransigence of our present Government on this issue, in spite of the findings of an official, Home Office Committee of Inquiry into Obscenity and Film Censorship (not unlike your own Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography 1970) which concluded, after 2½ years in session, that sexually explicit - or "obscene" - or "pornographic" - material was basically harmless and should, therefore, be freely available to consenting adults, has made any progress towards that end virtually impossible. In fact, if anything, restrictions are being increased here.

In our campaigning, we constantly cite the New York approach to this subject as an admirable example of what we would like to see emulated in this country. True I encountered no further instances of police harassment in the many other diverse places of entertainment, both heterosexual and homosexually orientated, I visited during my stay, but I do hope that the September 19th incident was an isolated one, that the case will be thrown out by the Court on December 10th and that New York will long continue to thrill, to excite and to exhilarate for many years to come.

One final point. On May 5th you appeared in a BBC Television programme called "Barry Norman on Broadway". In that programme you said that you had begun cleaning up 42nd Street and Times Square. If you meant by that the eradication of sex establishments per se (e.g. cinemas, theatres, night clubs, bookshops etc.), I beg you to think again. Some people, of course, will always object to such places, but we are convinced that the vast majority love all the razz-ma-tazz, the glitter and the "sauciness" they create. They are an intrinsic part of the heart of all large cosmopolitan cities. In a free society surely all tastes should be catered for and I know that the wide range of sexual attractions New York has to offer are of great importance to your tourist trade, which, according to an article I read in the "New York Times" whilst there, you very much both wish and need to encourage. If you take the fun out of New York, you surely take away its life-blood. I feel certain that you, as mayor, will never allow this to happen and that free, all-embracing New York, long may flourish.

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,  
Organiser,  
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts.

Copies to: The Chairman, American Civil Liberties Union  
The Administrative Director, First Amendment Lawyers' Association, U.S.A.  
Mr. Barry Norman, B.B.C.T.V. Centre, London.  
The Proprietor, Show Palace, 670, 8th Ave., New York.  
The General Secretary, National Council for Civil Liberties, London.