

CAVENDISH SCHOOL TALK

12th March, 1981

1.

Introduction

When I came into this room this afternoon, whether you were aware of it or not, whether you're interested in hearing what I've got to say or not, you will/^{each}have mad an assessment - an instant assessment - of me. I'm not thinking so much after I've begun speaking, but before I've even started. My appearance, my age, the clothes I'm wearing, will all have contributed to an image you will have formed of me, however off the mark that image may be of the real me, or, indeed, however spot on that image may be. However there is another terribly important contributing factor which has led you to ~~assess~~ your decision and that is "conditioning". From the moment we are born, we are all subject to "conditioning" and, of course, that is right and proper and it helps to shape our lives, to know right from wrong and teaches us to behave in a civilised, not anti-social way. - to be thinking, questioning and responsible people. The great danger is, however, that "conditioning" often goes too far and degenerates into "indoctrination". Indoctrination on matters of morals is, to my mind, both dangerous and stupid. It usually occurs with the best possible intentions of the indoctrinator (usually a parent or teacher) but invariably through ^{ignorance} lack of understanding or fear. It has resulted in ridiculous taboos, particularly about sex, being passed on from generation to generation, particularly by religious bodies. Just as you had assumed certain things about me when you first saw me when I entered the room because you have been conditioned to react in a certain way to certain things - if I'd been wearing blue jeans and a motor-cycle jacket, or dressed in Punk gear or in a morning coat ~~and~~, pin-striped trousers and a grey topper, your conditioned reaction would be quite different to the rather ^{square top of my} boring navy blue blazer and cavalry twill trousers reaction I'm sure you felt! - you are much more likely to assume certain attitudes - conditioned attitudes - about sex, and thus, of course, about publications on sex. It is with these that I am concerned, how our society tends to regard them and why I founded the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts. I shall try to keep my talk as short as possible because I usually find that the subject prompts many questions and I am sure that today will be no exception.

"Obscenity" and the Present Situation

Consensus of opinion (whatever one's attitude) that the present laws are a mess (mention Williams Report) - arbitrary, unclear, uncertain in operation, and, above all, repressive and unfair. Situation complicated by numerous other laws relating to "so-called" obscene publications - other than the 1959 and 1964 O.P. Acts, that is, which further curtail individual freedom and expression and, in effect, censor what we are permitted to see, read and hear.

Should we censor. Should a line be drawn and if so where?

Difficulty of any law of this kind - which is really a moral law - is that of defining "obscenity"; means different things to different people. As Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so "obscenity". A purely subjective term. What is obscene to you is not to me - and vice versa. (e.g. Boxing - show Sunday Times Colour Supplement).

The legal definition contained in the 1959 O.P. Act - that which tends to deprave and corrupt those likely to see it (read definition). The great non-sense about this definition, just as confusing as "obscene". Who can say for certain that a particular book, magazine or film would be likely to "deprave & corrupt" anybody". Not measurable - not possible. ^{So purely subjective} ^{bound to} ^{be ad-} ^{ministered} ^{to humanity.} judgements are applied. A court finds the material 'disgusting' or 'revolting' and then rules it to be "obscene" and in breach of the law. Section 3 of the 1959 Act - search and seizure - even more draconian - detail how the defendant has to prove that he is innocent - quite contrary to ^{basic} ~~legal~~ legal principles and natural justice. Examples of Bookshops in Blackpool (6 mths. imprisonment) and Exeter.

Each year hundreds of thousands of books, magazines and films seized and destroyed. Hitler began by book burning - and ended up by burning people. (800,000 in one raid alone). Thousands of films seized from film clubs. (Example of Tom Hayes & the two separate cases, Marlborough St. & Wells St.)

Further restriction enacted by Customs - Customs Consolidation Acts 1876 - imports and exports - use of "indecent" here - lower down the scale from "obscene" (read extract from their instructions); by the Post Office Act 1953; by the Cinematograph Acts 1909 and 1952 (used to censor films) ^{of numerous laws} ^{censoring public display not mention this Sunday's Bill -}

Enforcing all these laws uses enormous numbers of police and vast amount of police time - situation also aggravated because illegality attracts the criminal fraternity - explain & refer to Sir Robert Mark (Read extract from his Dimpleby Lecture). Mention James Anderton and his priorities. Cars are potential killers - sexually explicit material is not. *Drish & Smoking License*

My Attitude & How the N.C.R.O.P.A. was formed

I believe that every adult should have and inalienable right to see, read and hear whatever he or she chooses for him or herself. (I mentioned adult and I'll come back to that in a minute). There is no justification for censorship of any kind unless ~~there is incontrovertible evidence~~ real harm would be caused either to our society or to individual members of it. A certain amount of official censorship is, of course, for security reasons. There are laws of libel and slander to prevent false statements of a defamatory or detrimental nature. With regard to so-called "obscene" publications, however, which invariably means sexually explicit publications - or, what is often referred to as "pornographic" publications - there is no evidence that these are harmful. - *May be*
Indeed, in many instances, they are positively helpful, but certainly harmless.

There have been attempts, of course, to demonstrate otherwise. Mrs. Mary Whitehouse favourite ploy is to cite the work and "findings" of Dr. John Court an Australian psychologist at Flinders University Adelaide. The Williams Report that is the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship's Report, about which I'll speak more later, spent 164 pages on ~~the~~ ^{his} "evidence" but rejected it totally. He then submitted a further 150 pages to the Home Secretary. We had a personal meeting with the Home Secretary on 21st January. I hope that we have finally put paid to his nonsense. *I am not completely satisfied however. Just as I demand the right to see such explicit work, I'm going with suppliers who must have the right not to see. No limited measures on public display.*
There have been four major investigations into this subject - reliable and objective investigations that is. They are (give list). They all came to the same basic conclusion that pornography (sexually explicit material) of whatever kind, is harmless and should be ^{freely} available to consenting adults. Now I am sure you are going to ask me "Why only adults - or what do you mean by adults?". (Explain my personal attitude and the N.C.R.O.P.A.'s). It will affect you later, anyway, and I want you to think about this absurd situation, whether you feel that the law has any right to ~~force~~ decide for you - at least when you are a legal adult and whether the law - the criminal law, because make no mistake about it, that's what we are here dealing with - has any place in matters of morals. Obviously I do not, and that is why I founded the N.C.R.O.P.A. in 1976.

How it happened - totally unrepresentative minority of the general public was, or at least appeared to be, becoming increasingly successful in its efforts to force its ^{beliefs and} moral standards on the majority. Not on in a supposedly "free society". Actor - always exploding about some manifestation of censorship or other which seemed to appear in the press and on television daily - "Diamonds for Breakfast" - caravan at Blenheim Palace - Leonard R. - seed sown. Did nothing. Then

1976 "Inside Linda Lovelace" prosecution (show book) "Deep Throat" (still running in New York after 12 years - hence big demand for sex films, and why not?) Rather tatty little book, normally would have gone unnoticed. Became almost as celebrated a case as the "Lady Chatterley's Lover" trial 16 years earlier - at a cost to the British taxpayer of £100, 000 plus because the book was acquitted - that is it was deemed not to be "obscene", not likely to "deprave and corrupt". Heinrich Hannau made a lot of money out of it and had to reprint. This was the last straw. It seemed totally ludicrous. I wrote to the London Evening Standard about it, deploring the whole futile exercise and urged anyone with similar beliefs to contact me. Considerable if not enormous, response and the N.C.R.O.P.A. was born.

Forming the Committee - importance of non-gimmicky members.

What We do and What We Have Done

As a law reform pressure campaign, we concentrate most of our energies on Parliament and M.P.s. After all they are the people who have to be persuaded if laws are to be changed or introduced - or removed. We like to think that it was our constant pressuring of the former Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, that finally persuaded him to set up the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (which has come to be known as the Williams Committee after its very distinguished chairman Professor Bernard Williams, Provost of Kings College Cambridge). Briefly describe - show our evidence - their Report - and our appraisal. and its findings. Our disappointment that the present Government is not acting on it certainly in this parliamentary session.

Protest and Press Statements every time a censorship issue arises.
 Jens Thorsen case - Genesis P. Orridge at the I.C.A. - Prestel's Viewdata "Buyer's Guide to Dirty Books" - Child Protection Bill (Clement Freud & Whitehouse's carefully orchestrated hysteria - Lord Houghton) - Seizure of our leaflets by police twice - John Mortimer's advice - Protest to the Queen "obnoxious" & award of C.B.E. to Mary Whitehouse. - Duke of Edinburgh re article in "Sunday Mirror" - Cardinal Hume - Archbishop of Canterbury - Sir Horace Cutler and "The Romans in Britain" - details - G.L.C. Clean-up London Campaign - their hypocrisy about no censorship. - Leaflet distribution at Carte Blanche - H.M. Customs list of importers @ Everyman Library - Protests to police about harassment of film clubs - many raids often several in one day - affiliation to the N.C.C.L. - debates with Mary Whitehouse at Cambridge Union - radio & television interviews but general bias and imbalance in reporting of the subject - correspondence with the BBC D.G.

"On Calcutta" Tour and the Bath Clergy - God-botherers (not God-followers)
 Unlikely targets - e.g. Ronnie Barker and Dom Maclean. and Victor Lownes,
 although he has relented now! - "Caligula" here and in New York.

Summing Up

Our campaign is really nothing more than an extension of any freedom campaign. Individual freedom is being eroded daily and particularly in the realm of censorship. The highly-organised, very vocal, self-appointed "guardians of the nation's morals" have succeeded in forcing their minority opinions on the much more liberal-minded tolerant, live and let live, majority ^{before too long} - the silent majority, unfortunately. They often use highly-emotive, factually inaccurate propaganda to spread their repressive and bigoted doctrines. We must beware of them and their kind. We are only concerned with the facts. We must bring our censorship laws up-to-date and in line with modern, twentieth-century thinking. We must fight off a return to the viciously restrictive and unhealthy attitudes to sex of the past. Sex is not dirty - except to the dirty minded. Dirty minds are usually "conditioned" minds - ideas have been placed there which are often unhealthy and unhelpful. As intelligent, reasoning ^{people} ~~beings~~, let us get rid of repressive taboos. The N.C.R.O.P.A.'s eminently sensible proposals about adult publications and the laws controlling them are patently realistic, provide safeguards for everyone where needed and, above all, would harm no-one. They would, in the words of that exciting musical number from "Hair" "Let The Sunshine In" ^{and as Roy Jenkins said, a former Home Secretary,}
re the Permissive Society - the Enlightened Society