

~~GENCENSORED~~

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

7th March 1984

SENT TO ALL 16 PEERS' SIGNATORIES OF THE N.C.C.L.'S CHARTER
OF CIVIL RIGHTS & LIBERTIES, PUBLISHED IN 'THE GUARDIAN'
14/2/84 (SEE NEWSPAPER CUTTING FOR LIST).

As an organisation affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties, the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) was delighted to see that your name was amongst the signatories to and supporters of the N.C.C.L.'s Charter of Civil Rights and Liberties published in "The Guardian" on 14th February.

Your public endorsement of that Charter declares an unequivocal commitment to all its articles, including, of course, article 7 which pledges to ensure and safeguard the defence of the "essential right" of "freedom of speech and publication". We trust, therefore, that you will be demonstrating the strength and sincerity of your commitment to the N.C.C.L.'s hugely commendable cause, by opposing the present Video Recordings Bill when it reaches the Upper House in the very near future.

Of the 65 Members of the Lower House who also signed the N.C.C.L. Charter, and who have already had ample opportunity of demonstrating the strength and sincerity of their commitment to civil liberties and the freedom of expression by speaking out against this monstrous Bill, not one has done so. This surely smacks, either of lack of moral fibre, or of blatant hypocrisy. What is even more worrying is that there has not been one word of dissent over this Bill from a single Member of the entire House of Commons complement of 650, not one of whom has had the courage to declare publicly what we of the NCROPA know many believe privately, which is that this Bill is a nonsense, that it has been conceived in hysteria and that it is the kind of viciously authoritarian measure we usually associate in this country with the totalitarian régimes of both extreme left and extreme right wing dictatorships.

Some M.P. signatories to the Charter have gone even further. They have not simply refrained from opposing the Bill, but have actually actively and positively supported and championed it. Mr. Denis Howell M.P. has not only sung the Bill's praises both in the House and in Committee, but has assured us all that Mr. Gerald Kaufman M.P. and Mr. Alf Dubs M.P., his two fellow Opposition Front Bench spokesmen on Home Affairs, wholly endorse his views. Mr. Simon Hughes M.P. not only supported the Bill in the Second Reading debate, he was actually a sponsor of the Bill. Mr. Robert MacLennan M.P., although subsequent-

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ly expressing grave concern over many of the Bill's implications during the recent Committee Stage, did, regrettably, give the Bill his support during the Second Reading. Mrs. Renée Short, M.P., although once a committed libertarian, saw fit to sponsor another fairly recent piece of repressive censorship legislation, namely the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act of 1982. Hardly a pro-"freedom of speech and publication" measure!

All these M.P.s are N.C.C.L. Charter signatories. If they are merely using their espousal of the N.C.C.L. for political expediency, they must be exposed. If not, we shall expect to see them, and indeed yourself, standing up to be counted in all future situations where civil liberties are at risk. Nowhere are those civil liberties in such jeopardy as they are at present because of this country's intolerable censorship laws. The Video Recordings Bill is another of these insidious measures, possibly the most hideously repressive yet. It introduces the frightening and sinister concept of State Pre-Censorship for Adults. The vast majority of adults do not want censorship. This fact was dramatically borne out by the findings of the survey carried out by the Video Trade Association. Out of more than 22,000 replies to questionnaires supplied to the general public, 81.4% were against the censorship of videos shown in private homes. Clear-cut, undoctored statistics of this kind cannot and must not be ignored and any civil libertarian who ignores them does so at his or her peril.

Finally, and perhaps most disgraceful of all, not a single Conservative M.P. has endorsed the Charter. We would have expected all 395 Tory M.P.s to have rushed to sign without question, being members of a political party which claims the 'freedom of the individual' as the cornerstone of its whole philosophy. Speaking in the Rates Bill debate on 17th January, former Tory Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Heath M.P., reminded his colleagues in the House that he had been elected to the Commons in 1950 on Winston Churchill's slogan "Set the people free", (a slogan re-echoed by the present party chairman Mr. John Selwyn Gummer M.P. at last year's annual conference in Blackpool), but that that was not "a proposal to set the people free to do what we tell them to do". It seems that Mr. Heath's timely reminder has fallen on deaf ears, including, of course, his own.

"The Guardian" advertisement has told us of your views on civil liberties. Please now tell us of your views on the Video Recordings Bill. We shall not, of course, expect these views to be inconsistent, nor, we trust, your Parliamentary voting habits thereon.

We look forward to the courtesy of your esteemed reply.

Yours sincerely,

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