



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

4th March, 1985.

The Editor,
"The Times",
P.O. Box 7,
200 Gray's Inn Road,
London, WC1X 8EZ.

Dear Sir,

Once again the conviction of a dangerous rapist and psychopath for horrific crimes of sex and violence has been seized upon by the pro-censorship lobby as endorsement for their endless demands for still more censorship of sexual material in this already censor-saturated country.

No-one would deny the gravity of the appalling crimes committed by Malcolm Fairley (alias 'The Fox'), but the notion expressed by trial judge Mr. Justice Caulfield, by defence counsel, and even by Mr. Fairley himself, according to the police, that he was provoked into committing these crimes by watching 'pornographic' video films, is as absurd as it is facile.

It is both irresponsible and dangerous to promulgate such simplistic answers to questions of motivation in complicated but still, fortunately, comparatively rare crimes of this nature. The question that should be put is the much more appropriate one of cause or effect? Even the most superficial examination of the background and history of the illiterate and innumerate Malcolm Fairley clearly indicates his inadequate and disturbed personality, a common trait of nearly all rapists. This was freely admitted in Court and has been even more vividly illuminated in the enormous press coverage given over to this case.

If watching sex films turned him into a rapist, why are there not masses of similar attacks committed daily by the millions of others who have ever watched a sex film? Why have these people not been turned into rapists? Why have the unfortunate victims of 'The Fox', some of whose videos he is reported as having watched after breaking into their homes, not themselves been turned into rapists? I am not suggesting that an already sufficiently disturbed person may never be adversely affected by watching a sex film, or any other kind of film for that matter. There may be that risk. However, in the much wider, healthy and desirable interests of a free society, such a tiny risk must be taken and accepted.

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An arsonist may injure and kill people when he sets buildings on fire, but nobody would blame the shopkeeper who sold him the matches he used to start the fire or the manufacturer who made them. Matches in the hands of an arsonist are potentially dangerous. Sex films in the hands of a rapist may also be potentially dangerous. (They may, of course, also be potentially therapeutic.) However, after an arson attack, society does not scream out for matches to be banned. It is concerned only for the removal of the arsonist from society. After a rapist attack, why should not society content itself with applying that same remedy?

In Malcolm Fairley's case, a much more expected and pertinent outcry would be for the banning of all firearms, since it was the power of the gun which undoubtedly chiefly contributed to the success of his crimes. Gun-owners would certainly counter any such outcry by pointing out the many legitimate, necessary and harmless uses to which they put their guns, and by demanding their continued legal availability, and rightly so. The same can also be said of sex films, except that the many existing draconian censorship laws in this country ensure that such films are not legally available already, unfortunately. This viciously repressive censorship grip is something which, far from being tightened, desperately needs to be relinquished.

The N.C.R.O.P.A. is not unused to these intermittent post-trial furores by those who boast easy solutions to all of society's problems. They do nothing, however, to add to serious, rational debate on the censorship issue, nor enhance the spurious and unproven claims of the pro-censorship lobby. They simply underline the rightness of our cause and harden our resolve to 'see them off' and see off censorship with them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Webb', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

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