

DEFEND GAY'S THE WORD CAMPAIGN
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Friday 27 June 1986

Dear Gay's The Word Supporter,

NEWSFLASH!

H.M. CUSTOMS & EXCISE TODAY AGREED FORMALLY TO WITHDRAW THEIR ACTION AGAINST GAY'S THE WORD AND ITS NINE DIRECTORS AND TO DROP ALL CRIMINAL CHARGES ARISING FROM THE INFAMOUS "OPERATION TIGER". THIS BRINGS TO AN END ALMOST TWO AND A HALF YEARS OF CUSTOMS HARASSMENT AND REPRESENTS A MAGNIFICENT AND TOTAL VICTORY FOR THE DEFEND GAY'S THE WORD CAMPAIGN. CUSTOMS HAVE FINALLY ADMITTED THAT THE LAWS GOVERNING THE IMPORTATION OF BOOKS ARE NOW IN TOTAL DISARRAY AND HAVE GIVEN GAY'S THE WORD AN UNDERTAKING THAT FROM NOW ON IMPORTED BOOKS WILL BE TREATED IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY AS BOOKS PUBLISHED IN THE UK.

We are writing to you personally so that you will be one of the first to hear of this great victory. Following months and years of lobbying, legal action, pressure from the NCCI, publishers authors, anti-censorship groups, and - most of all - the lesbian and gay communities, Customs have agreed that the disgraceful case against Gay's The Word should be dropped - or "compounded", to use the official term for the particular ruse which has been called on to get Customs off the hook on which they were almightily impaled. This humiliating decision results from a realisation at ministerial level that current Customs law in the area of literature is totally unworkable.

Under the "compounding" of Gay's The Word's case, all criminal charges will be withdrawn against all defendants, the trial due to start at the Old Bailey on October 6th will not take place and the vast bulk of the books will be returned to Gay's The Word. No punitive action whatsoever is being taken against Gay's The Word and no books will be destroyed, although Customs have insisted that 19 of the original 142 titles seized should be returned to Giovanni's Room in the United States. Customs are not saying that these books cannot be reimported and the bookshop is currently taking legal advice on its position were it to reimport them. But Gay's The Word will definitely start importing literally hundreds of titles published in the U.S. since 1984 and which have been denied to British readers because of Customs threat.

Customs have agreed with Gay's The Word a procedure whereby they will indicate "in principle" in advance whether action would be taken against any particular book if it were imported and this will give Gay's The Word the chance to take the matter before a magistrate court if Customs indicate that action would be taken. But Customs have agreed that no books which would be freely available in this country will be stopped at the ports. This is the key victory. It means that the quite outrageous behaviour of Customs throughout this case will no longer be possible. In agreeing to these "visible" procedures, Customs are accepting one of the key demands made by Gay's The Word throughout - namely that "secret lists" of banned topics should be replaced by an upfront and clear policy which is open to challenging in the courts.

What is incredible about this humiliation for Customs is the way in which they have totally climbed down and totally given in to the arguments of the Defend Gay's The Word Campaign. Virtually every campaign objective has now been achieved except one - and that is that although Customs have agreed that the law as it stands is unworkable and will not be enforced, the relevant provisions of the 1876 Customs Consolidation Act still remain on the Statute Book. Customs officials have indicated that they would like to have the law formally changed - a motion to this effect was passed by their trade union, the SCPS, last year. The NCCL and the Defend Gay's The Word Campaign will be pressing backbench MPs to take this up and are now very confident of success.

OUR DEBT TO THE LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY

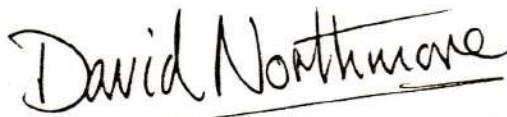
It is absolutely clear that this major gay rights victory would quite simply not have been possible without the overwhelming support we have received. The strong campaign which Gay's The Word was able to mount - and which clearly worried Customs a lot - was only possible because of the money and countless other forms of support which was received. With that support, we were able to fight this campaign in a very systematic and organised way. The knowledge that the community was 100% behind us kept us going when things looked pretty bad - and there were a lot of times like that! This victory will affect all of our lives in one way or another and is a victory for all of us. Thank you a million times. We will be holding a victory celebration in a few weeks time to which, of course, you will be invited and at which the bookshop directors hope to be able to express their thanks personally.

THE FUTURE

We have not had too much time to think of the future yet except in very broad terms. There will still be a campaign to defend the rights of lesbian and gay men to import the writings of their sisters and brothers abroad. It is virtually certain that Customs will object to some of these and that this will need to be fought in the Courts (although prosecutions against individuals are now very unlikely to happen again). Fighting these cases will be expensive and will involve a great deal of thought as to the most promising way to go about it. We would hope to involve a wider range of book importers than just Gay's The Word. You will be kept fully in touch with future plans both for the Campaign and for the Trust Fund.

BUT FOR THE MOMENT, WE HAVE WON. WE HAVE SHOWN THAT OUR COMMUNITY CAN FIGHT BACK AND THAT IT CAN WIN. WE HAVE HUMILIATED THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO KEEP US DOWN. AND WE HAVE DONE ALL THIS THANKS TO YOU.

With very best wishes,



GRAHAM MCKERROW

DAVID NORTHMORE

DEFEND GAY'S THE WORD CAMPAIGN COORDINATORS