

NCROPA MEMBERS' GENERAL MEETING

4TH DECEMBER 1989

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Home Office has just published a new edition of their 'Practical Ways to Crack Crime' Handbook. A most worthy cause most would say, myself, of course, included. But there is one section in it which troubles me and which I think is also a very disturbing pointer to the Government's current over-riding attitude in so-called 'law and order' issues. There is a section headed "Men can help too". Its about women's safety. Again, something with which we would all agree is of the greatest importance. But the section details some ways in which men should behave in public so as "to make them feel safer" (READ - Page 5)

Now on the face of it these may seem fair enough but what worries me about it is the implied notion that all men are potential women molesters, which, apart from being quite untrue is grossly insulting, but much more importantly positively helps to create a climate of thought which leads women to believe that they are constantly at risk, in danger from all men, and fear builds on fear developing into hysteria. It is exactly the same syndrome we have recently seen manifested in the child molestation and abuse issue and which led so tragically to the nightmare experiences of those innocent Cleveland parents. And it is exactly the same syndrome which we are presently witnessing in the current feminist campaigns against, not simply fully sexually explicit material (which as we all know is not openly available in this country anyway, otherwise why would we be here?) but against any material which contains depictions of women in any way of which they personally do not approve. Their justification for these actions is that such depictions are demeaning, degrading and, furthermore, create a climate which "reflects inequality and injustice and reinforces discriminatory attitudes and behaviour". I'm here quoting from the CAP's and the NUS Women's Campaign leaflet 'Off the Shelf' headed by Clare Short and other MPs. In other words they are saying to everybody else, "We will decide the way in which your thinking is to be conditioned. We will ~~control your thought nourishment~~ decide what you're allowed to see. We will control your thought nourishment. A chillingly ORWELLIAN concept if ever I heard one.

The common factor to the three examples I've given is that guilt is presumed beforehand and innocence has, in effect, to be proved after. In the case of the Home Office booklet, all men are presumed guilty of molesting women whether or not they ever have or are ever likely to do so. In the Cleveland child abuse cases, parents were virtually deemed guilty of abusing their children at the outset and were required to prove their innocence. And in the feminist campaigns against sex-orientated publications, the publications are declared "guilty" of causing all manner of

heinous offences without a shred of evidence, and the publishers/vendors/consumers are required to prove that they don't and are 'innocent'.

It is a complete reversal of those two fundamental legal principles "innocent until proved guilty" and "the onus of proof is on the prosecution" - to prove guilt, not on the defence to prove innocence.

This worrying reversal of principles is finding its way more and more into British law (for example in the confiscation of assets of convicted drugs dealers). It is a dangerous trend and one which must be stopped, however well-intentioned its defenders may sometimes be. Because the appalling view with regard to sexually explicit material - pornography if you like, or whatever - that "Well, I can't prove it but I don't like it and I know it causes harm", is certainly growing and, if we are not very careful, I can well foresee the introduction of some kind of legislation wherein this kind of irrational nonsense is enshrined.

The fanatical feminists (fascistic, ~~fanatical~~ fanatical feminists, as I insist on accurately calling them) have in the past 13½ years existence of the NCROPA, never loomed large amongst our opposition groups, chief of which have been the religion-centred factions, especially, of course, our old friend Mary Whitehouse and her National Viewers and Listeners Association (National View-and-Listen-to-what-We-Tell-You Association!) There is no doubt, however, that the feminists are our current biggest threat. I, personally, do not accept for one minute that they are representative of the majority of this country's womenfolk per se, but their movement, having failed to make any significant inroads into AMERICAN society or on the European Continent, seems currently to be concentrating its efforts to secure a real foothold here. Because of this country's inherent hypocrisy, bigotry and intolerance, and because it has no built-in constitutional safeguards against 'tyranny', like the U.S. Constitution, it could well succeed. The sad thing is that so many of our politicians, or even people of influence elsewhere, seem so frightened to speak out against them and stand up for principles which are common to all of us, and rights to which we are all entitled irrespective of gender. It is getting across this message that I see as the NCROPA's prime task in the year ahead.

Mr. Chairman, members will, of course, be aware that it is a long time since our last General Meeting. This is, of course, very regrettable and unsatisfactory., but it has been due to lack of money, lack of time, my own personal, family and health problems - and because there are only 24 hours in a day and certainly every spare minute I've had has been devoted to dealing with the issues which daily confront such an organisation as the NCROPA, issues which invariably demand immediate response. And I know I won't need to remind you that nobody receives a penny for all this work.

Its all done voluntarily.

There is no doubt that the NCROPA's greatest handicap is lack of money. When I consider the not necessarily excessive funds which are available to some other campaigning organisations, and compare them to our own pitiable coffers, I sometimes wonder how on earth we've managed to do the enormous amount we have done, and continue to do. More money - many more members - is one answer. Perhaps an increase in membership fees, which have remained the same since March 1983, might be another consideration which would help. Perhaps members would like to make known their views on this later on.

I am, however, delighted to report that, during the past week, the NCROPA has received a magnificent donation of £1000.00 from one of our publisher supporters and we are enormously grateful to him for his most generous gesture. Also earlier on in the year we also received a most generous donation of £300.00 from an anonymous benefactor and to him, also, we are enormously grateful. Eric Miller, the longest serving member (jointly with myself, of course) of our Committee, agreed last year to take on the onerous task of Membership Secretary to relieve me of some of that side of administration. You will be aware that we haven't, as yet, quite got on top of chasing up subscriptions due and so on, but as soon as this meeting is over, Eric will be commencing a systematic and regular updating of the membership register. I, on my part, will endeavour to keep members more informed about what is going on with more newsletters, although I must add that current resources are usually the deciding factor ^{which turn} ~~about~~ such intentions ~~turning~~ into reality.

Since we last met we have been most fortunate to welcome two new members onto our Committee. Alexander Barrie, who is a businessman and writer of children's books, joined us ? (Unfortunately he is not here tonight. He has the flu) and Isabel Koprowski, Editor of "Forum" magazine, joined us in . Isabel has for a long time consistently 'plugged' the NCROPA in "Forum" and we have recruited a number of members as a direct result of her initiatives. AS mentioned in the Newsletter, Isabel is much in demand for media appearances - radio, TV, interviews etc - and this is such an asset to us in these present feminist-charged days, when we are doing battle with the likes of the Clare Shorts/ Jill Knights/ Dawn Primarolos/ Catherine Itzins of this world.

There is such a vast amount of activity that we have have been involved in on your behalf that it is impossible for me to report on it comprehensively here. The following is just a selection of some of it and hopefully to familiarise you with some of the everyday things with which the NCROPA deals.

Every year, at the beginning of the new parliamentary session, a ballot is held

amongst MPs for Private Members' Bills. Twenty names are picked out of whom, probably only the first six have any real chance of any legislative measure they choose becoming law because of the time restraints. When each ballot takes place the NCROPA writes to each of these top-twenty MPs and sends them a copy of what we call our 'Freedom of Expression' Bill - a Bill to make provision for freedom of expression for adults regarding sexual and religious matters', as its preamble states. In effect it is a Bill repealing most of the existing legislation which presently impedes the attainment of the NCROPA's aims. We ask MPs to consider promoting our Bill, or one based on it. Not surprisingly no MP has yet accepted our offer, but perhaps more surprisingly each year a number of them do express sympathy for its aims and write to say so. This year's ballot only took place last Thursday so its too early yet to report on any outcome or reactions. There is always a great worry over these Private Members' Bills that someone will be persuaded to take on a Whitehouse-PROMOTED OR Short-promoted measure. So, as usual, we shall be watching the outcome very closely.

As I mentioned in the Newsletter, our submission to the B.S.C.'s Code of Practice Consultation Exercise (SHOW) was submitted in January. The BSC is not yet a statutory body although it will become so in the forthcoming broadcasting Bill. It published its Code of Practice as part of its 1st Annual Report last month (SHOW). Included in its report is an Appendix listing the names of organisations it consulted while drafting the Code. The NCROPA's name is not included, although all others, including predictably the ~~NWLA~~ and even that of a new feminist organisation, the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship (a contradiction in terms if ever I heard one.) which wasn't even formed until April 17th, more than six months after the official deadline set by the BSC for submissions! I wrote to Lord Rees-Mogg, the BSC's Chairman on 7th November asking him why this was so. I received a curt one line reply on 13th November from its Deputy Director which read "I am sorry that NCROPA WAS OVERLOOKED when we compiled Appendix 2 of our Annual Report". I have written again to Rees-Mogg asking why we were "overlooked" and was this done deliberately because of our declared total opposition to the BSC, its formation and its constitution? I have also asked that the Home Secretary be informed of this omission (the BSC's report is ordered by the Home Secretary), that a corrigendum slip be inserted in every copy sent out in future and that in any future print run the name of the NCROPA is added. As I pointed out in my reply:- (READ)

Incidentally the BSC is now open to accept complaints about "the portrayal of violence, of sex, or matters of taste and decency on broadcast services". So why not swamp them with NCROPA orientated complaints e.g. whenever a sex scene has knowingly been cut from its cinema version, or a four-letter word has been bleeped out, or a programme that you personally find 'indecent' or 'tasteless' e.g. perhaps something transmitted from the House of Commons, or if you are like me, not into religion, "Songs of Praise". Anyway, anything you can think of which will demonstrate the absurdity of their

function, please utilise it. Their address is, by the way, 5-8 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS.

We shall be discussing the future of NCROPA's affiliation to the NCCL later in the meeting. Let me just mention here, however, that each April, at their AGM, we send delegates and usually have cause to table at least one motion regarding a matter of mutual relevance. In Buxton in 1988 we tabled one opposing the extension of the O.P. Act to broadcasting, which was carried. This year, in London, we tabled four. Three were concerned with constitutional amendments to strengthen the NCCL's Rules against individuals and organisations infiltrating its membership whose views were in conflict with those of the NCCL and who seek to subvert its intended aims and hijack its platforms for their own opposing interests. Regrettably these were not carried. However a fourth motion calling on the Government not to give the BSC statutory powers of censorship was carried.

The only major change in the law which is of relevance to the NCROPA is that enacted as part of the 1988 Criminal Justice Act, wherein simple possession of 'indecent' photographs of children under 16 years of age was made an offence. Whilst the NCROPA did not challenge the basic premise of this new enactment, concerned as we are with 'consenting adults', on 15th March 1988 I did make representations to all 20 members of the H.of C. Standing Committee examining the Bill about certain reservations we had about its definitions and interpretation worries. We also expressed concern about any law which made it a criminal offence to possess a mere photograph of an illegal act - in this case the taking of an 'indecent' photograph of a child under 16. There are, we argued, obvious dangers in applying such a principle across the board. We also criticised the use of the word 'indecent' - too vague and imprecise and subjective, also the lack of definition of what is a 'legitimate' reason for possession. - and, again, the use of a vague term like "unreasonable" as a defence for keeping such a photograph. Amongst the members of the Standing Committee was Mrs. Ann Taylor MP from the then opposition front bench, who told me that they had made all the criticisms we had put forward, but that the Government would not accept any of them. The reply I had on behalf of John Patten MP, the Minister responsible for the Bill, gave an assurance, however, that children were their only concern (READ Letter 21st April 1988, - para. 2).

Over the past two years requests from people in trouble with the law as a direct result of our draconian censorship laws, for advice and help, have increased dramatically. Quite a number of these are referred to us from the NCCL. This is an important part - albeit perhaps a spin-off - of our many activities, but perhaps not generally known. There is no doubt that the now full implementation of the 1984 Video Recordings Act is having its dreaded effect. X Most calls I've received have been from individual members of the public who have ordered material (mostly

videos) in response to newspaper or magazine advertisements, and have subsequently found themselves the subject of police investigation, usually for breach of the 1953 Post Office Act - the sending or procuring the sending of indecent or obscene material through the Post. It happens usually like this (GIVE DETAILS).

The other main area where members of the public become unaccustomedly involved with the law enforcement authorities is with customs, either because mail addressed to them from abroad has been intercepted and seized by Customs on the grounds that it is indecent or obscene, or material deemed to be of that category is discovered by Customs officers in passengers luggage at sea or airports. In nearly all cases involving breaches of the Post Office Act, the victims (for that is how I regard them, rather than the criminals) are usually blissfully and genuinely unaware that they are breaking any law - and there is even much confusion amongst passengers from whom items have been seized by Customs officers, about what they are and what they are not allowed to bring in with them. This is hardly surprising since there is considerable inconsistency amongst customs officers themselves, what some do and others do not ^{allow} the owner to keep. And, of course, this in itself is hardly surprising when such ridiculously imprecise and arbitrary terminology as 'indecent' and 'obscene' is their yardstick. However since the proliferation of videos, there is no doubt that there has been much stricter enforcement. I took part in a broadcast debate on so-called 'pornography' for BBC Radio Kent last year and one of the other participants was a senior customs officer from Dover. He told me that former confidential instructions to officers to let single items or small quantities of such material through if they appeared to be solely for the use of the passenger, had been changed. The chief reason was videos which can so easily be copied, he said. He said that their main concern was the search for drugs but that in any case about 75% of pornographic material still gets through. I said that that wasn't good enough. It should be 100%!

Several of those people who contacted us who have been caught by customs have been helpful in providing confidential details of their experiences and we are currently ^{making} ~~preparing~~ representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department, under which jurisdiction Customs and Excise falls, particularly with the run-up to 1992 and the single European Market fast approaching.

The NCROPA's correspondence is vast as the many files filling my flat bear witness. We always try to respond to every major issue and, as far as possible to many smaller ones to, for example the recent refusal of the BBFC to grant a certificate to a video called "Visions of Ecstasy" because they claimed it would infringe the common law of blasphemy. I am currently in close touch with the film's producer and he is in the process of an appeal to the Video Appeals Committee.

NCROPA HAS FEATURED in many newspaper articles - although still not enough - and

I have taken part in many radio and TV programmes, promoting the anti-censorship cause, the latest of which was on Thursday last on London's LBC "Talkback" radio with - guess who? - yes, dear "Mary". I was also in the Yorkshire Television late-night programme "The Jmes Whale Radio Show" on 17th November - and, Isabel Koprowski has also been on that programme previously. David Kennington has also been on LBC "Talkback" radio as a studio guest and Ted Goodman participated in yet another LBC studio confrontation with Mrs. Whitehouse ^{now the also} ~~is~~? The Mary Whitehouse Mafia still seems to be effectively blocking any appearances of mine on BECTV, which has become so Whitehouse-orientated nowadays that in February this year on their Breakfast Time TV programme, they actually transmitted a NVALA promotional video! Their excuse was that she and her organisation were celebrating ^{their} 25 years anniversary. I wonder if in the year 2001 they will afford us the same facility?? I am currently in correspondence with the BBC's Director General over the preposterously biased "Heart of the Matter" programme which went out recently, entitled "Cross Channel Sex", where I've raised the whole question of imbalance in the reporting and discussion of 'our' subject in BBC programmes. So who knows? Perhaps one day the BBC will deign to allow me the use of their cameras.

I have, of course, also had many correspondences with many M.P.s., some of them quite prolonged and some of them quite bad-tempered. Whenever I get one of their replies which says words to the effect that:- "I don't think any useful purpose would be served in continuing this correspondence", I know that I've won the argument, even if not the conversion. My correspondences with the two Howarths - Gerald (Tory) about his broadcasting and obscenity Bill, and George (Labour) - about his sponsorship of Dawn Primararolo's 'Location of Pornographic Material' Bill, were classic examples of this.

The NCROPA has received review copies of a number of books, including "Porn Gold" from Faber & Faber (Heditch & Anning), "Civil Liberties in Conflict" from Routledge (Gostin) and "Feminism and Censorship" from Prism Press (Chester & Dickey). We are also grateful for a number of magazines which are sent to us, including "Skin Two", "Penthouse" (from time to time) "Certainty", "Him", "Pleasure Bound" and we subscribe regularly to "Index on Censorship", although most of this publication deals with political censorship issues throughout the world. And Tuppy Owens (who has agreed to join our Committee) always very kindly sends us a copy of her 'Sex Maniac's Diary', in which she lists the NCROPA in the 'Freedom Action Groups'

We are still selling copies of the few publications we have available, like our evidence to the long lost and disgracefully neglected Williams Committee, and are about to have new promotional leaflets and letterheadings printed.

Mr. Chairman, I've left out so much, but I must finish. In the Newsletter which has

just been circulated to all members, I mentioned that I had recently written to the new Home Secretary, David Waddington, in the hope that he might be more amenable to our pleas, and would at least agree to meet us to discuss them. I have just received his reply and I have to say that I don't like what I've received one little bit. Because it is a very up-to-date resume' of the Government's present thinking in this contentious area, I will read you the letter in full. (READ)

The most ominous part of it is, of course, that they appear to be considering a change of the present legislative test for obscenity. There is no doubt that any such change to the present test, appalling and unacceptable though that already is, would be, in the present climate, a change for the worse and, I'll wager, a change which will effectively transfer the onus of proof of guilt from the accuser to the accused, in exactly the same way I was deprecating earlier.

On that grim note, I must end. One thing it does serve so clearly to underline, ^{however,} is the desperate, imperative need for the continued ⁱⁿ existence of the NCROFA - and, above all, its strengthening. Please do everything you can to help bring this about, and, of course, thank you for your loyal support in very difficult times and especially for attending tonight.