

~~CENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

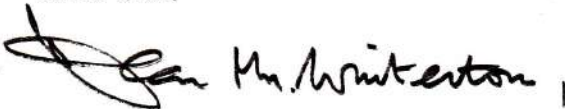
FIGHTING SEXUAL CENSORSHIP

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NO/DAW/DP

26th October 1992

Nicholas Winterton, Esq., M.P.,
House of Commons,
Westminster,
London,
SW1A 0AA.



Thank you for your long letter of 21st October in reply to mine of 19th October, and I am most grateful for your consideration of this matter.

Even so, your letter does not answer the fundamental question I put to you about 'freedom of expression' and Conservative Party Credo. Before returning to that crucial central point, however, may I respond to a number of specific points you raised in your letter?

(1) Assuming that by your use of the word "pornographic" in your first paragraph you mean 'sexually explicit', I and the NCROPA find nothing intrinsically bad about 'sexually explicit' pictures, even if they are sexually arousing - indeed, quite the reverse!

(2) In any society, but particularly the peculiarly British one, those who would seek to suppress something of which they themselves do not approve are inevitably always those who are most demonstrative in their opposition, the ones who write most industriously and shout loudest. Those who are tolerant of the other person's right to freedom of expression and would staunchly defend their right to publish anything, even that of which they profoundly disapprove, are, sadly, often negligent and lethargic in demonstrating their point of view. It doesn't surprise me at all that most of the letters regarding the publication of this book have supported your action in trying to get it prosecuted and thus banned for all. What does surprise me, however, is the way in which so many of our M.P.s are naive enough to interpret the number of letters they receive expressing a particular point of view and the number expressing the opposite, as a true barometer of the opinions of all their constituents. I doubt very much if the number of 'anti-Madonna' letters you received/anything other than a tiny percentage of all the 36477 votes you received in the

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last election, and certainly only the tiniest fraction of the total number of 62995 Macclesfield voters.

(3) You were, I accept, fair enough to acknowledge that you had received some letters from those who, like us, disagree with your views and criticised your action. May I make it absolutely clear, however, that the NCROPA is not in the business of making appraisals of any publication. Our sole concern is that, in a 'free society', freedom of expression is paramount, even when that which is expressed is not to our liking, or even gives us offence.

(4) Whilst I welcome your purported acceptance of the John Stuart Mill philosophy of freedom of individual action provided that no harm is caused to others, it always worries me when such expressed, and undeniably worthy, sentiments are qualified by "by and large" and "within certain parameters". That usually means the sentiments are effectively nullified. It reveals the desire on the part of the individual concerned to draw a line where he or she wishes it to be drawn, i.e. between what is and is not to be allowed others to express. However you try to justify it, and however you look at it, this is censorship - and freedom of expression simply cannot co-exist with censorship. It is a contradiction in terms.

(5) You state that the book is "one of titillation value, rather than of hard-core pornography". I am not sure exactly what you mean by this, but it would appear that you are saying that it is not sexually-explicit enough fully to arouse sexually. Whether or not this is so (different readers will react to it differently, surely), it is, in any case, quite irrelevant. What is wrong with being sexually aroused? Sexual arousal is wonderfully pleasing and a perfectly harmless, natural, human biological phenomenon, a point I made in my speech to the Brighton 'fringe' meeting, you may recall.

(6) You express your concern that the book is "universally available" and that "it will be widely seen by children who may be seriously adversely affected by its content".

Notwithstanding that I know of very few children with a spare £25 in their pockets and the free, unsupervised opportunity - or, indeed, desire! - to go into a high street bookshop and purchase a copy of such a book, I would very much like to know just why you think a child seeing it would be "seriously and adversely affected by its content", and just how this harm would manifest itself?

(7) However, even if we accept the premise that the book's contents might be harmful to children (which we certainly do not!), there are a million things in our society which are potentially harmful to children but on which we do not place a blanket ban for all. Alcohol is freely available to adults, and it is not unlawful to have it, if one so chooses, in our homes - even in homes with children. Alcohol is not only harmful to children, it is also of serious potential harm to adults, too. Thousands of adults die every year as the direct re-

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sult of alcohol-abuse related illness. Another known and proven killer, cigarette tobacco, is also freely available for adults. Furthermore the Government gladly milks these 'harmful-to-children' commodities for hundreds of millions of pounds worth of valuable revenue. Glue solvents actually kill around 150 children every year. Some children play with matches, start fires and are incinerated, yet no-one in their right mind cites such tragic abuses as grounds for matches to be banned!

Society expects - and demands - that proper, responsible parental or guardian control will be exerted over children by their minders and backs this with appropriate laws which operate against those who neglect such supervision. If there is any risk posed by the free availability of these and innumerable other articles, society reasonably regards the taking of such a risk as wholly justified when balanced with their weightier and wider benefit for all of us. This emotive, but dishonest "protect our children" card has been played to death. It has been the dominant weapon in Mrs. Whitehouse's armoury for years and it is high time it was exposed for the sham it largely is.

(8) Censorship Law in the U.K. is now indisputably the most authoritarian, viciously repressive and draconian of virtually all European Community Member States and most other 'free world' countries also. Your claim that it "fails totally to protect our youngsters from harm" is, with respect, absurd.

That the Director of Public Prosecutions decided that there is no case to answer in law against Madonna's book is not a reflection on the ineffectiveness of our already outrageously restrictive British censorship law, but a measure of just how hysterically over-reactive your outcry against the book was. As far as I can see, all it has achieved has been to afford the book a great deal of additional free publicity and thus helped to swell its profits and further line Madonna's already over-stuffed pockets. I do hope that her publishers do the decent thing and write and thank you.

Finally, may I return to my opening point and the crucial question I put to you about the obvious conflict between your personal views on 'freedom' and those of the Conservative Party? How can you reconcile your continued Party membership with this clear difference of philosophical viewpoint?

Once again, thank you for your interest in the views of the NCROPA. This is, as you so rightly stated, a very important matter and your comments on what I have had further to say about it here will be much appreciated. I shall look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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