Feminists Against Censorship

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Spring 1994 Update

Yes, we know you should have heard from us earlier. But take a look at what's been keeping us busy:

THE ALTON BILL: Capitalizing on the murder of James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys and the statement by the judge (which bore no relationship to the facts in the case) that violent videos must have something to do with it, David Alton presented a bill with all-party support to restrict videos with violent and sexual content. (Interesting; sexual materials were never mentioned at all in connection with the crime.) Actually, such materials are already controlled by the Video Recordings Act 1984, but the campaign has naturally led to a lot of high-profile noise from the National Viewers and Listeners Association.

Any proper review of the research shows that there is no reliable evidence of a link between viewing material and violent behaviour, as Guy Cumberbatch at Aston University has shown in his reviews for the government. But Cumberbatch's work is dismissed by anti-video campaigners who believe that false statements by judges and the press are enough "proof" for them.

The most revolting thing about this is that no one seems to be talking about what really killed Jamie Bulger—the two boys who murdered him were known to be seriously disturbed, but no one was keeping an eye on them or taking care of the problem, thanks to government cuts. Why is it that people who don't even have time to decry this neglect of troubled children are suddenly all full of "concern" for "our children" when it gives them an excuse to censor sexual material?

Under the circumstances, pointing to videos as the cause of these problems is nothing less than the most immoral irresponsibility. It's enough to make you wonder whether the people who launch these campaigns aren't deliberately trying to distract us from getting proper programmes in place to help troubled young people.

And of course, true to form, Alton also introduced an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act to make it illegal to portray anyone who presents an "inappropriate role model". Do you want these people defining what are proper role models for children?

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL: The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill 1994 was introduced just before Xmas (so no one would notice) and was already given its second reading on 11 January. Part VII of the bill, although on the surface appearing to cover child porn only, extends child protection *and* adult obscenity laws to cover computer materials, and makes violations of the Obscene Publications Act arrestable offences; this means that the police can now arrest people and search their homes without a warrant. The bill also further restricts public protests.

And that's just the bit that is of particular interest to FAC. The rest of it is horrible, too—making gypsy travellers illegal, penalizing people for using the right to silence, setting up privatized concentration camps for young offenders, banning rave parties (or any party with loud music involving ten or more people!), generally altering the rules of evidence to make it easier to convict people for no reason, and so on, and so forth. The whole thing is a police state design.

We sent a fresh submission to the House of Commons Home Affairs committee and put out a press release on the 10th of January in the hopes that either we would get immediate interest from the press as the bill was being read (we didn't) or that the press would call us at the point at which Part VII of the bill was being discussed—but it turned out they weren't even going to discuss it.

And *then* everyone went mad after a "report" David Alton commissioned to support his loony, repressive amendment was sent to the press and they all took it seriously. No one was paying attention to the Alton amendment before, because it was, frankly, unbelievable. But child psychologist Elizabeth Newson's "report", which was really just nine pages of moralistic, ignorant typescript with a title page, was headline news in every paper, and next thing you know the Labour Party's Tony Blair is going to Downing Street to tell the government they have to make the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill even more Draconian than it already is.

We are trying to develop more campaigning tactics against the bill, although now we are stuck with trying to influence the Lords. Meanwhile, WRITE TO YOUR MP voicing your objections to the bill, point out that Part VII gives the police dangerous new powers for no good

reason, and that this mostly affects materials no one thinks should be illegal—and particularly materials that *women* like. And express your dismay that so few people have condemned the Alton amendment and the press hysteria over it.

ZERO TOLERANCE: The Association of London Authorities has launched a London campaign against domestic and other violence against women. On the whole, their materials don't look too bad. But they have posters up saying that successful men abuse women (is this advice to men on how to be successful, or what?), and they keep citing a "study" (by anti-porn campaigner Liz Kelly) that says that 71% of boys (doesn't say how old) said they might use violence (doesn't say what kind) in their future relationships (doesn't say whether they mean tussles in the schoolyard or marital violence); and the question was not also asked of girls as a control group, as it properly should have been, to create a comparison. The concentration on the belief that most men are abusers is pretty dangerous stuff. (Why do these people never talk about the fact that child battering, which maims and kills many children every year, is primarily *female* violence?)

MAD COP DISEASE: Some European sex magazines are available in British Editions, edited so as not to contravene our laws (in other words, much less explicit). One reader in England ordered the British edition of such a magazine and was sent the European version by mistake—and the cops opened it. Naturally, they went to his home and searched the place. When they found private photographs that he had taken of his wife, the cops were abusive towards her (for being the kind of woman who would let her husband take erotic pictures of her), and he is fighting mad. He expects to get off on the charge concerning the magazine because he received it as a result of an error, but he wants to fight back and is starting a fighting fund.

LAW COMMISSION: The Law Commission have announced a study of physical assault and consent (SM), in an apparent attempt to make sense of the Spanner judgement (*Brown*), which had held that any "injury" that left a mark, however trivial or transient, was criminal assault, even if consensual. The Law Commission consultation paper suggests that a distinction should be made such that only serious injury would be criminal in a consensual circumstance.

MAD MPS: The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on Computer Porn has issued its initial report. Although several anti-censorship groups (including FAC and Campaign Against Censorship) made submissions, at least one of them (National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts) were told that their position was "out of touch." To show us who is "in touch", the only campaigning group whose submission they chose to print was from Christian Action Research and Education (CARE), the current incarnation of the Festival of Light. With the exception of British Telecom, all of the published submissions (most were from the police authorities) favoured censorship of sexual material. They tended to cite Catherine Itzin's atrocious book on pornography in support of their allegations. Alas, they ignored FAC's submission, which cited real authorities on sexual violence and development.

CAMBRIDGE "ANARCHISTS"? In the last update we reported on a group of alleged anarchists who were incensed that other alternative publishers and bookshops (AK, Housman's, Freedom) have been supportive of FAC. Until recently, we were unable to find out anything about who these people are, but one of us recently met a couple of them—who are also members of the Campaign Against Pornography. They couldn't understand, they said, how we could oppose their position, when the FBI report says that pornography is linked to crime. We told them they should check their sources: the American moral right has been spreading the rumour that the FBI report says this, but, in fact, the report doesn't say anything about pornography, since it has nothing to do with crime. It's a shame to see "anarchists" getting their information from Focus on Family.

And a final farewell to DEREK JARMAN (1942-1994), who fought censorship and controversy for many years before succumbing to AIDS on 20 February.

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