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## **LEGISLATION NO GUARANTEE AGAINST ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

The National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts has made strong representations to the Government not to extend the Obscene Publications Acts to public service radio and television. It not only opposes such an extension, but argues that the Acts should no longer apply to publications where consenting adults are concerned.

In a letter to all members of the Cabinet, David Webb, NCROPA's honorary director, describes British censorship laws as a disgrace, especially when virtually all other countries of the western world have long since dispensed with censorship as we know it.

NCROPA asserts that public service broadcasting is already more than adequately controlled by various broadcasting Acts. These are supplemented by the broadcasting authorities' own "voluntary" guidelines.

"To inflict further censorship restrictions on the programme makers and subject them additionally to the inhibiting confines of the Obscene Publications Acts, the lamentable results of which, in other media, are all too familiar to anyone who cherishes freedom of choice and individual liberty, would be an act, not only of recklessness, but of crass stupidity. It would also be an act of gross hypocrisy for the present Government so to legislate, formed, as it is, by members of a political party which ever proclaims 'the freedom of the individual' as the cornerstone of its whole philosophy."

Calling for the repeal of what it describes as "repressive, puritanical and out-moded Obscene Publications Acts", NCROPA refers to the recommendations of the 1979 Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (the Williams Committee) which have still not been acted upon.

"In promoting such demands, we are not asking for that which is outrageous, or even unreasonable," NCROPA declares.

"It is vital to the arts and entertainment in general that they are allowed a free hand, if they are to expand, and flourish and progress. News, current affairs, documentaries and other factual programmes must also be free from state interference so that they can inform and enlighten honestly, impartially and fully. It will be intolerable for TV and radio producers and directors constantly to have to subject their programmes to the absurd 'deprave and corrupt' test of the 1959 Act — absurd because 'depravity' and 'corruption' are both highly subjective terms and legally unquantifiable. The even more absurd 'grossly offensive to a reasonable person' test, as promulgated in Gerald Howarth's (or was it the Home Office's?) recent and unlamented private member's Bill, will certainly not do either, since practically everything shown on television is 'grossly offensive' to someone, somewhere, and every someone, somewhere, thinks of him or herself as a 'reasonable person'. The mind-boggling consequences of carrying so lunatic a definition to its logical conclusion would mean that no programme would theoretically be transmissible."

Although television violence is rightly a matter of major concern, NCROPA argues that "it is essential to keep a proper perspective.

"Violence always has and, regrettably, always will be a part of society. Violent crime may have increased in recent years. On the other hand methods of detection, greater inclination to report crime, or even simply population increases, may all have something to do with this. There is also a widely-held view that crime is certainly no more rife now than it ever was, and possibly considerably less so. . .

"Broadcasting, both television and radio, reflects society, warts and all, and that must be right.

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### *Legislation no Guarantee*

Violence-free television would not only be dishonest, it would be boring. . .

"The impact of television on the viewer, either in programme or advertisement form is not, however, one of unqualified and unchallenged persuasiveness. The images transmitted on the screen certainly publicise, familiarise and inform the viewer, but that in no way ensures or compels approval or acceptance, or even any positive effect one way or the other of such images or ideas suggested by them. The notion that anything shown on television is automatically and uncontrollably desired or imitated may be the advertising industry's pipe-dream, but it is, in reality, a myth. A much more valid notion is surely that what is screened, particularly if it is disliked or unpleasant, will inspire aversion. That same criterion will also apply when violence is screened.

"The argument that children are at risk, even if adults are not, is also grossly over-stated. Children are perfectly capable of differentiating between fantasy and reality and are not nearly as vulnerable as many of our would-be censors would have us believe."

NCROPA believes that there will always be misfits and oddballs who will be a risk and at risk. No amount of legislation will guarantee society's protection against such elements.

"There are many anti-social activities in our lives, but in its wisdom, and in the wider, over-riding interests of a free society, Parliament does respond to these with harshly authoritarian restrictive legislation. It does not ban the sale of solvents because a minority of children (about one every six days) kill themselves by sniffing glue. It does not ban alcohol because a minority of people kill themselves and others by excessive drinking (about 1,000 people are killed on the roads every year by drunken driving). It does not ban motor vehicles because a minority of 5,000-6,000 lives are lost each year in road accidents. It does not ban smoking because a minority of approximately 100,000 people die each year as a direct result of the habit. And it should not ban TV and radio programmes because a minority of people become violent criminals, notwithstanding that any positive link between their harmful behaviour and what is seen on television has ever been proven, in spite of the many spurious and often ludicrous attempts at so-called scientific research to do so."

The statement concludes that the Government's ill-conceived plans for broadcasting censorship must be scrapped, "unless we are to end up with wall-to-wall 'Blue Peter', 'Gardener's World' and 'Songs of Praise'."

*NCROPA: details from David Webb, Honorary Director, 15 Sloane Court West, London SW3.*

## **Bible-Inspired Bashing**

A wooden paddle on which biblical quotations are painted is being used to beat children of religious families in New Zealand. One of the inscriptions is "Withold not correction from the child. . . Thou shalt beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell."

A leader of the Assembly of God Church said that most Bible-believing people believe in discipline with a rod or ruler.

"Our people are free to get things like that from the Scripture Union bookshop," he added. "Our Sunday school teachers might have them to show to the children, but if a child is naughty his or her parents are told and the discipline is up to them."

Mrs N. Dawson-Wheeler, an Education Department clinical psychologist, confirmed that there had been a disturbing number of child abuse cases involving religious families. The children were often covered in bruises.

"Some of the children I have dealt with have told me their mummies and daddies told them that the bluer the bruises the more the devil is driven out of them."

## **Christians' Bloody Squabble**

A born again Christian's home in Enfield, north London, was the scene of a bloody Sunday confrontation which left a 31-year-old woman fighting for her life. Gillian Mechora was found by police in the front garden of a house in St Mark's Road suffering from multiple stab wounds. She was taken to Chase Farm Hospital suffering from a collapsed lung and damaged liver.

It appears that a row broke out between Miss Mechora and two men shortly after all three had attended morning service at the local Pentecostal Church. That afternoon she was driven by one of them to the house where the other man, William Forbes, had a flat. It is believed that they had been having a relationship and she had gone to break the news that it was over. Neighbours heard loud screams shortly after Miss Mechora and her friend arrived.

Mr Forbes, who was suffering from a stab wound and a head injury, was also taken to hospital. He said that God told him what to do.

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**Nine Mormon missionaries have been expelled from Grenada. They had been working without permits, but the main reason for expulsion was what a government official described as their "negro shut up" attitude. Black people were banned from membership during the church's early history and until 1978 were not allowed to hold high office.**