

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS (NCROPA)

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT THE CONWAY HALL,
RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1 at 7.00 p.m. on Wed., 5th Dec. 1990

PRESENT: David Webb (Hon. Director), Alexander Barrie, Ted Goodman, Isabel Koprowski, Eric Miller, Tuppy Owens

1. Apologies for Absence: through illness, were received from David Kennington. It was agreed that the minutes should record the Committee's best wishes to him for a speedy recovery from his recent operations.
2. Welcome to New Committee Member: The Committee warmly welcomed Ms. Tuppy Owens to its ranks, although she was already well-known as a long-standing and enthusiastic NCROPA member.
3. Minutes of Last Meeting: held on 6th July 1989, were approved as read, with a number of minor amendments, and duly signed.
4. Matters Arising from Minutes of Last Meeting: Isabel Koprowski asked for longer notice of the dates of Committee Meetings. The Director agreed to comply with this whenever practically possible.

It was agreed that, in view of the developments at this year's AGM of the NCCL, the NCROPA would reaffiliate to that organisation at a suitably appropriate moment.

5. Director's Report: The Director welcomed the demise of the 'Thatcher Era', but cautiously reserved his judgement of the new P.M., the new Home Secretary and what would happen with our 'full' integration into Europe in 1992.

He apologised for the long time since the Committee had last met, but explained that the AGM on Dec. 4th had intervened. Even so this was far too long a gap.

The Director reported on the following items:-

He had received a personal reply from Lord Rees-Mogg (to letter of 20/11/89) re protest at NCROPA's name being omitted from list of organisations consulted by the Broadcasting Standards Council when drafting its Code of Practice. "There was only a straightforward error, fortunately the only one so far detected, and I can only offer apologies that you should have been its victims". He promised that the Home Office, to whom the BSC's annual report is made, would be notified.

Letter sent to editor of the Londoner's Diary in the "Evening Standard" re his piece about Joanna Bogle who edits "Crossbow" (Journal of the Tory Party's Bow Group) - he had omitted to include that she was a very active member of the NVALA and was being groomed to take on Mrs. Whitehouse's mantle (11/12/89).

NCROPA's motion (15/12/89) for NCCL AGM, re motion 24 of previous year's AGM - the Itzin motion effectively promoting more censorship - was rejected for inclusion on the agenda by their Conference and Elections Sub-Committee, on the grounds that it would not be understood by the meeting! The Director reported on the fierce battle that took place - appeal to the NCCL Executive Committee and then discussions with Ted Goodman (legal adviser) and Counsel (Nigel Ley) in his chambers. Preparations were made for a possible High Court appeal. However in the event, at the AGM on 22/4/90, NCCL's previous 'policy' (Itzin's motion) was overturned and NCCL returned to its former - and correct - position re censorship (albeit by a disturbingly small majority). He had attended as an individual member, since the NCROPA had decided not to renew its affiliation pending the outcome of the NCCL AGM.

A "Feminists Against Censorship" organisation had been formed in Dec. 1989, and a letter of congratulations and support had been sent. Letter of thanks from Linda Semple received (20/12/89).

Ted Goodman, his wife and the Director had attended a performance at the Purcell Room, South Bank, on 5th Jan. 1990 of "Onan", satirical entertainment about sex magazines and contemporary sexuality (from the Edinburgh Festival).

The Broadcasting Bill had begun its parliamentary stages on 9th Jan. 1990 and progressed to the Statute Book on 1st Nov. 1990. The NCROPA's representations had largely already been made at White Paper stage, and before, throughout the lengthy process of this Bill's enactment.

Robert Hayward, Tory MP for Kingswood, Bristol, had tabled a House of Commons motion complaining to the Home Secretary about comedian Dave Allen's swearing in his BBC1 programme on 6th Jan. 1990. Mr. Hayward had replied - after much prompting - to the Director's letter deploring his action. He had answered virtually none of the points point to him, but assured the NCROPA that he was against censorship! (Director's letter sent 9th Jan. with copies to the Director-General of the BBC - Michael Checkland - the Producer of the programme and Kenneth Baker, MP, Conservative Party Chairman. He had also written to Dave Allen who had replied on 31st January 1990 with many thanks "on all our behalfs that we may all enjoy the freedom of the individual".

Eric Miller had appeared in a film about Amsterdam, sex and religion entitled 'Encounter' and screened on ITV on 7th August 1990.

On 4/1/90 BBC2 had transmitted a 'Newsnight' programme about child pornography. They had undoubtedly employed illegal and improper practices in making this programme - placing fake 'ads' in 'Exchange and Mart' etc. The Director had laid an information about this before Sir Peter Imbert on 15/1/90 requesting that he investigate (Sir Peter is Chief Commissioner, Metropolitan Police). A reply from the head of the Obscene Publications Dept., Superintendent Leslie Bennett was received stating that it would "not be in the public interest to proceed". The Director issued a Press Statement to the P.A. on 17/1/90 and a News Media Release on 22/1/90.

On 16/1/90 the Home Office announced the setting up of a survey of available research on the effects of 'pornography', to be carried out by Drs. Guy Cumberbatch and Dennis Howitt.

Letter sent to John Chapman, "News of the World" journalist re his article on 'Perverts in the Dock' which was stupidly critical of Holland and its enlightened attitude to 'sex' and so-called sexual 'perversions'. Copies of his letter also sent to the Dutch Ambassador and the N.O.W. editor, Patsy Chapman.

MP Dawn Primarolo's 'Location of Pornographic Material Bill' was formally presented to the House of Commons on 23rd January 1990.

Allan Green, QC, the Director of Public Prosecutions announced on 29/1/90 that Dr. Kalim Siddiqui, director of the pro-Iranian Muslim Institute, who had publicly endorsed and called for the death sentence on Salman Rushdie issued by Ayatollah Khomeini's 'fatwa' to be carried out, was not to be prosecuted because of "insufficient evidence"! A strong letter of protest to the DPP sent 12/2/90.

David Mellor MP (Minister of State Home Office) had written to Teddy Taylor MP in Jan. 1990 saying that the Government were considering strengthening Britain's obscenity laws. Mr. Taylor had expressed anxiety that a "torrent of pornography" would swamp us with the introduction of the Single European Market. "For our part we take the view that the Obscene Publications Act 1959 could with benefit be strengthened", he wrote. The Director had written to Mr. Mellor on 2/2/90

asking him if this was so and to explain further - no reply! He wrote again on 14/3/90 - again, no reply!

He reported on the SCAT Club court case (31/1/90). Robin Drew, the chief press officer of the 'Help the Aged' charity, and one of those involved in this case, had committed suicide, after Customs officers raided his home after literature about this private sex club based in Holland had been intercepted by Customs in the post. Seven others were also involved and were subsequently convicted of various offences. At least one received a prison sentence. One of the defendants had contacted the NCROPA (he is a law lecturer!) and the Director had twice attended preliminary hearings of his case at Thames Magistrates' Court. He had also sent a letter to the editor of the "Daily Mirror" deploring the holier-than-thou, disapprovingly tut-tutting tone of the article they had published about Mr. Drew's tragic suicide. The homosexual newspaper "Capital Gay" had also published a letter from the Director about this sad event, on 9th February 1990.

Isabel Koprowski had appeared in a large double-page spread article in the "Daily Mirror" on 1/2/90 with MP Dawn Primarolo, entitled "Porn - the great debate".

The Director had been invited to lunch by Paul Raymond on 12th February 1990, with his Chief Executive and Legal Officer, Carl Snitcher, to discuss matters in general but mainly Mr. Raymond's intention to set up and fund academic research about sexually-orientated material. The Director said that he had suggested Dr. Bill Thompson, of Reading University, as being the most suitable. The Director had stressed the great need for the NCROPA to be properly funded, whilst at the same time retaining its independence of any outside source of body. This was essential if the NCROPA were to preserve its credibility.

Many NCROPA letters had been sent to the so-called 'quality' newspapers, but still very few of them were ever published. One that was (22/2/90) was hugely cut. This was in response to a large 'Guardian' article published on 15/2/90 entitled "Should pornography come off the top shelf?"

On 18/2/90 Superintendent Leslie Bennett (Head of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications squad) was 'exposed' in a "Sunday Mirror" front page article as an ex-'Gamblers Anonymous' member and drag-lover, as well as being a deacon at a Middlesex Baptist Church. He said that, whilst the NCROPA had no wish to be morally judgemental on any of these activities, it did find hypocrisy utterly repugnant - viz. some of Supt. Bennett's utterances on 'obscene' publications! (In a speech to the NVALA, for example). He was being moved from his job to divisional work at Chelsea.

On 24/1/90 Ted Goodman and the Director had met Paul Ferris, the author and freelance journalist, at the Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria, London, to discuss his commissioned forthcoming articles on 'porn' for "The Observer". A number of visits from Mr. Ferris to the Director's flat, a lunch and many phone conversations then subsequently took place prior to publication in "The Observer" on April 29th and May 6th. Although Mr. Ferris had referred to himself as "very resourceful", the Director said he was very upset by his reference to the NCROPA as a 'tiny' organisation. He said that he did not feel that Mr. Ferris had intended to sleight us and, indeed, he had since been in contact by phone again regarding the Old Bailey SM trial and a new book he was now working on about 'porn' and censorship.

On 8th January 1990 Director Nick Boothby filmed an interview about the NCROPA and censorship in the UK with the Director at his flat for transmission on French TV.

On 20/2/90 a critical letter had been sent to the Women's Editor of the "Daily Mirror" re her stupid article "They're not just pin-ups of nude women" (Daily Mirror 1/2/90). A copy was also sent to the Editor of the paper.

The Director had been invited to attend the book-launch at the Conway Hall, London,

on 14th February 1990 of Nicolas Walter's "Blasphemy Ancient & Modern". (Nicolas Walter is the Director of the Rationalist Press Association). The NCROPA Director had been invited to make an impromptu speech about his efforts to get those who had publicly been calling for Rushdie's death, prosecuted.

On 26/2/90 the Director had attended Lambeth Magistrates Court with David Kennington as NCROPA Observers at the committal proceedings of members of NCROPA accused of offences concerning 'body-piercing'. Facilities for the public at this court were dreadful and it had been impossible to hear the proceedings. After protests from Dr. Kennington and the Director, to the magistrate through the defendant's Counsel, the magistrate invited them into the well of the court - which greatly displeased the police on duty!

The Director had taken part in a radio interview and discussion with presenter David Ross for BBC Belfast 'Talkback' programme on 1st March 1990. His opponent had been Monica Hinds from the Rape Crisis Centre. Representatives from the Campaign Against Pornography were originally invited but refused to take part in a programme with him.

The Director had been a guest speaker at a seminar of Libertarian & Classical Liberal Thought hosted by York University Freedom Society on 17th March 1990 at Derwent College, York.

A Covent Garden shop-owner and manager were fined £200 and £100 respectively for displaying chocolate willies (under the provisions of the Indecent Displays (Control) Act). "The People" had reported the story and called the policeman who carried out the raid "Sgt. Nerd"! (his real name being Nurthen) He subsequently sued "The People" for libel and won and was awarded £25,000 damages on 31/10/90. The Director read out a letter he had written to "The Guardian" about this disgraceful affair. His letter had not, alas, been published.

Russell Twisk, the editor-in-chief of "Readers' Digest", had sent a copy of the May 1990 issue to the Director with an article in it by Jack Straw MP called 'Stop This Indecent Exposure to Porn' (based on his earlier piece in "The Times" and about which he had corresponded - to Mr. Straw). The Director had sent a copy of that original correspondence with Mr. Straw to Mr. Twisk which was gratefully acknowledged.

On 21/4/90 Ted Goodman and the Director had attended the Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society in London, where they had met and talked with Michael Foot MP, the Guest of Honour. The NSS are staunchly anti-censorship and good, supportive friends of the NCROPA, he said.

Isabel Koprowski and the Director both took part as guest panellists in Anglia TV's "Frontline" programme on 3/5/90, transmitted on 4/5/90.

The Director was a guest speaker at the Islington & Harinegy Gay Group at the London Lesbian & Gay Centre on 8/5/90.

On 17/5/90 the Director took part in the tvs programme "The Time .. The Place.." in Southampton, hosted by Anne Diamond. The discussion subject was child molestation and bogus social workers etc. - called "Keeping Our Children Safe".

On 21/5/90 Elizabeth Coldwell, the editor of "Forum", had interviewed the Director for an article about the NCROPA which was published in the Vol. 23, No 10 1990 edition. As a result of this article, he had received many new members and letters. He thanked Isabel Koprowski for her initiative in setting this up.

An Edinburgh College of Art Degree Art Student, Paul Binnie, had been refused permission by the Principal to display publicly four gay-themed paintings in his own degree show - "on legal advice".

The Director had written to the Principal on 16/8/90. The Assistant Principal had replied on 20/8/90 saying that they had been withdrawn because of the "risk of public prosecution under Scottish Criminal Law". He accepted that there is a case for amending the law relating to obscenity.

On 11/7/90 the European Court of Justice ruled that a Member State can ban the sale of pornographic items in unauthorised shops without violating the rules of the EEC Treaty Article 30, ^{on the free movement of goods}. The case had been referred to the Court by Chelmsford Crown Court. It had been brought by Quietlynn (Brian Richards).

The NCROPA's annual subscription to "Index on Censorship" had been renewed on 25/7/90, although the Director had been infuriated by this erstwhile splendid publication allowing Catherine Itzin to write an article for their September issue which was nothing more than blatant propaganda for her grotesquely named Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship! The Director had written a strong letter of protest to the Index's editor on 16/10/90. but had received no reply.

A BSC Survey had found that only 12% of 1009 people questioned believed television was the primary reason for the alleged increase in violence in our society (80% thought it was a more violent society),

Oftel, the Government's telecommunications watchdog announced in August 1990 that all chatline telephone services must henceforth be recorded. A letter of protest had been sent on 3/8/90. The reply received on 20/8/90 was absurd. It could easily have been the reply to someone else's letter, so non-sensical were its comments.

On 6/8/90 an article was published in the London "Evening Standard" headed 'British Children in Porn' and about campaigner Phillip Carlo (USA) attacking, in particular, the Dutch for their claimed indifference. The Director's letter (13/8/90) pointing out how wrong he was especially for blaming child sexual abuse on 'pornography', was published. It was replied to on 20/8/90 by Superintendent Hames, new Head of the Obscene Publications Dept. at Scotland Yard, who disputed his assertions. The Director had sent another letter in reply to the Super's claims on 21/8/90 but this was not published. He was, however, intending to send a copy to Hames personally.

On 22/8/90 the Director attended a preview performance of "Let My People Come" at the Boulevard Theatre in London. He was introduced to the audience as the Director of the NCROPA at the Commencement of the show and warmly applauded.

On 9/8/90 a Blackpool man was prosecuted at Preston Crown Court for taking photographs of his two naked children (aged 4 and 6) romping in the sunshine with a playmate.

The Director had written a letter to "The Guardian" on 15/8/90 regarding the 'field day' the media had been having with child abuse stories - 'snuff' videos, Satanic rituals, rampant incest etc. It had not been published so it was read out to the meeting and complimented.

The Lesbian & Gay Freedom Movement had demonstrated outside a one-day conference for Men- Opposing Pornography, held in Brixton on 15/9/90. They had sent NCROPA their literature.

On 16/8/90 the Director had written to the Governor of Wandsworth Prison asking why inmates are not permitted to have homosexually orientated magazines on the same basis as heterosexually orientated mags? His reply on 20/8/90 said that they were "subject to exactly the same restrictions as heterosexually orientated magazines."

Freedom of Speech and Publication had triumphed (not surprisingly) in Cincinnati,

when obscenity charges against an art gallery and its director were dismissed - for staging an exhibition of the works of Robert Mapplethorpe, a photographer.

Paul Raymond had sent the Director a copy of the research report he had commissioned from Dr. Bill Thompson et al subsequent to the discussions they had had earlier on in the year and to which he referred previously. It was called "Soft-core" - A content analysis of legally available pornography in Great Britain 1968-90 and the implications of Aggression Research". Published in September 1990. Paul Raymond had also sent a copy of another piece of research he had commissioned-the NOP sponsored survey on censorship in April 1990.

The Director reported that he had been approached on 1/10/90 by Outlaw Films re participation in and help with a planned future TV series for Channel 4 called "The Pornbrokers". A 'treatment' of the series had been sent and the Director had made his observations to the producers.

Superintendent Hames addressed Mrs. Whitehouses's fringe meeting of the Conservative Party Conference at Bournemouth on 10/10/90. The meeting had been picketed by the newly formed "Conservatives Against Sexual Censorship" campaign, run by Sean Gabb. One of our members, Jeremy Pender, had written to and met Mr. Gabb and the Director said that he would now be making contact with him.

The Director took part in the 'Time To Know' Demonstration and Rally through central London and at the Dominion Theatre on 19/10/90 re censorship, especially news media censorship. He recorded a radio interview en route.

On 23rd October 1990 the Director gave a talk to the Society for Individual Freedom - 'NCROPA AND CENSORSHIP' in Whitehall, London.

The "Surrey Mirror" published a letter from the Director in response to one they had published from Mary Whitehouse dated 25/10/90. It was a 'tit-for-tat' letter about the NCROPA's planned Petition to combat hers (NVALA's) Campaign to Outlaw Pornography.

It had been necessary to purchase a small portable electric typewriter, since the large Silver Reed model which was donated by a supporter had ceased to function.

The NCROPA had very gratefully received an anonymous donation of £3600 from a member. The Director suggested that a deposit account should now be opened with some of this money and this was agreed.

Delectus Books wrote to the NCROPA in November asking for advice. Books they had imported from the continent had been seized by HM Customs at Dover. Ted Goodman was asked to write to them.

The Director told of the ever increasing number of requests from students, schools and others for information about UK censorship matters, and also the increasing number of calls for help and advice from people in trouble with the law e.g. the O.P. Acts, video recordings, advertisements and especially customs. The Director then related his alarming experience upon returning to the UK with six video-cassettes given to him by a colleague and friend in Amsterdam, Holland. He had been interrogated for several hours, arrested, strip-searched, and then shown a search warrant to search his flat. He told how he was taken under escort by five customs officers, joined by two more police officers from Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Dept. in Chelsea, and forced to allow the seven officers to search his premises, from where a number of other video cassettes were taken as well as personal 8 mm films and two copies of Customs Officers Instructions.

6. Reports From Other Committee Members: Isabel Koprowski detailed some of her campaigning activities in the cause of freedom of expression, which had involved her in many public debates, interviews and discussions on radio and in local, national and cable television programmes. The debates included those at Bradford

Brighton and Manchester Universities and at Gray's Inn Debating Society, at which she was opposed by Clare Short, M.P. A radio appearance had included one in which Chris Tame of the Libertarian Alliance, and Mary Whitehouse were participants. In addition she had attended a "Penthouse" International Conference in Mexico, at which the delegates from other countries expressed shock at the great restrictions on freedom of expression existing in the U.K.

Ms. Koprowski said that she had established contact with Dr. Bill Thompson (a University lecturer and researcher, and a member of the NCROPA), Pluto Press and Feminists Against Censorship. She had also written to the leaders of all political parties represented in the House of Commons. She had received only one unambiguous reply, namely from the leader of the Welsh Nationalists who declared that his Party supported Dawn Primarolo's 'Off-the-Shelf' Bill! (the Location of Pornographic Material Bill).

Ms. Koprowski reported that an issue of "Penthouse" magazine had recently been ruled "obscene" by Nottingham Magistrates' Court as a result of a complaint lodged with the police by a feminist. However, the Court could not make its desired destruction order because the time limit had expired, owing to delay by the Prosecution. She also added that Granada Service Stations were insisting that issues of "Penthouse" be enclosed in an opaque wrapper before being displayed on their premises, the same situation as that prevailing regarding the American edition in the State of Texas. She also revealed that British troops in Arabia are prohibited from receiving "Penthouse" whilst in that country. She said that the main problem for her magazine was, however, the present economic recession which had caused a regrettable downturn in sales and necessitated the unpleasant task of making some staff redundant.

Eric Miller recounted how an acquaintance of his who sells sexually explicit videos abroad, had offered to help the NCROPA by including its publicity material ~~material~~ with its brochures but, for understandable reasons, the NCROPA had politely had to decline this offer. Mr. Miller said that he continued occasionally to appear as a defence witness at 'obscenity' trials, in the capacity as a 'man-on-the-Clapham-omnibus' consumer of 'pornography'.

Mr. Miller explained how the Dutch Government proposal, regarding the lowering of the age of consent to twelve years, had been misrepresented by the British media so as to allow it to be ritually condemned (on programmes such as "Any Answers", for example). The actual Netherlands legislation merely restricted prosecutions for sexual intercourse involving persons between the ages of twelve and sixteen to cases where one participant was aged over sixteen or where the parents of a participant or the participant made an official complaint.

Tuppy Owens told the unfortunate story of her participation in an LBC radio phone-in programme about bestiality, prompted by a news item about a man copulating with his cat! There had been complaints to the management of LBC, which had reacted by imposing a life-ban on her and dismissing the programme's producer and its presenter.

She said she was very depressed by the current trial of members of a sex-club (the S/M "Operation Spanner" trial at the Old Bailey), in which the judge had stated that the law must "protect people from themselves" by punishing some types of sexual behaviour. It

was agreed that she would accompany the Director to the adjourned hearing in mid-December.

7. Date and Venue for Next Members' General Meeting: It was agreed that this would be in January 1991 at Conway Hall and that half the time would be reserved for members' questions and views.
8. NCROPA Petition to H.M. Government: It was decided that the NCROPA would draft and gather signatures for a Petition to H.M. Government in opposition to the one currently being assembled by Mrs. Mary Whitehouse and the NVALA (the Campaign to Outlaw Pornography), and which she had been publicising by writing to local newspapers. One such was the "Surrey Mirror". It was noted with satisfaction that a counter-letter from the Director of NCROPA denouncing her Petition and publicising our own had also been published in that paper.
9. NCROPA Demonstrations/Pickets/Vigils etc.: It was decided not to mount any immediately. For the first time in years no anti-porn Bill had been presented in the new Session of Parliament (not even a private member's Bill) and, in any case, such activities, designed to give the NCROPA a much higher profile publicly, were best left to warmer weather.
10. Date of Next Committee Meeting: It was agreed that the next Committee Meeting should be held after the January 1991 AGM.
11. Any Other Business: The Director was asked to consider contacting Mrs. Anne-Marie Jensen, a NCROPA member, who had indicated her willingness to serve on the NCROPA Committee. The Director said that he was also considering the possibility of inviting (with the Committee's approval) Mr. Jeremy Pender to serve on the Committee. He was an articulate, long-standing and very keen member.

The meeting closed at 10.10 p.m. approximately.



Howard Director, N.C.R.O.P.A.

21st November 1991.