

THE LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY REACTS

For most people in the lesbian and gay community, news of the raid was deeply shocking and disturbing. A meeting was immediately called for Sunday April 15 at County Hall. There were nearly 200 people at the meeting, of whom a third were lesbians. The shop's workers and the raided directors gave statements about what had happened. Then the meeting was opened to general discussion. This covered the far-reaching political implications of the raid, including its wider context in the current attempts to widen the scope of both 'indecent' and 'obscenity' laws; and also the political arguments within the lesbian and gay community, for example whether or not the lesbians present could be expected to support all the titles detained or could reserve the right to object to some whilst still supporting the bookshop. In order to clarify this, and to discuss a specific women's response to the raid, the lesbians at the meeting called a separate women's meeting. Out of this came A Woman's Right to Read and Write, who can be contacted at the campaign address. There are regular meetings, and all women are welcome.

It was agreed that three areas could be initially singled out for organisation: media, demonstrations and a broadsheet. These groups are now organising various events.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1. Write to your MP, local councillor, etc:
asking her/him to condemn the raid;
asking her/him to lend support to or sponsor the Defend GTW Campaign;
asking her/him to write directly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Treasury Office (who is responsible for Customs).
Please send a copy of replies to us.
2. Motions through your union branch or local party:
3. Write to local press, radio talk-backs etc.
4. Support demonstrations, benefits etc.
5. Send donations (see coupon).
6. Visit the bookshop (66 Marchmont Street, London WC1. Tel: 01 278 7654) and buy something.
7. Send reviews of any title on the list (to the address below).

NAME

ADDRESS

.....

Please keep me informed

Please send model resolution and background papers

Please send SAE.

Please supply me with 10/20/50/..... copies of this Broadsheet. (Free bulk supplies available for mailings, demos, meetings etc.)

I enclose £..... as a donation.

The space here is for your comments and suggestions, or for offering specific talents to the Campaign:...

.....

DEFEND GAY'S THE WORD CAMPAIGN
38 Mount Pleasant
London WC1X 0AP

Defend



Gay's The Word Campaign

LESBIAN & GAY COMMUNITY BOOKSHOP RAIDED

CUSTOMS & EXCISE IN 'OPERATION TIGER'

800 LESBIAN, GAY AND FEMINIST BOOKS DETAINED!

THE RAID: OPERATION TIGER

On the morning of April 10, two officers from HM Customs and Excise knocked on the door of Glen McKee's flat. Glen is on the board of directors of Gay's The Word Bookshop. The officers proceeded to go through his flat, inspecting everything they could lay their hands on. They were rude and off-hand. They took material relating to the shop, and also personal items and private papers.

At 1pm, officers walked into Gay's The Word and told Paud Hegarty, one of the two workers at the shop, to close it. Ten customers were asked to leave. The Customs officers then spent the rest of the afternoon examining the shop's stock and business materials. Amanda Russell, the shop's manager arrived and was taken to C&E HQ. Amanda and Paud were questioned at length about GTW's business dealings: they were both denied access to legal advice and not allowed to use the phone. 800 volumes, nearly a third of the shop's stock, were taken off the premises that afternoon. Officially they have been 'detained': but the raid does not stop there.

Amanda Russell was escorted from C&E HQ to her house, which was searched. Books were taken from her address and videos (mostly *Coronation Street* but also *Cruft's Dog Show*... these were later returned).

When Jonathan Cutbill, another of the board of directors arrived home from work that evening he found two officers waiting. Jonathan is an antiquarian book collector, and the officers were faced with a house full from top to bottom with books. Nevertheless they searched every room and went through personal papers and belongings.

In the course of the day, the GTW workers and directors in conversation with the officers discovered evidence that:

1. They had a code-name for the raid: Operation Tiger.
2. The day-to-day workings of GTW seemed to have been under surveillance for almost 18 months.
3. Outgoing and incoming mail from the shop may have been opened over this period.

WHAT IT MEANS

Our first response to the news of the raid was one of shock. For us, Gay's The Word is the focal point of the London lesbian and gay community to which we belong. We have met lovers there, made friends, attended meetings and readings and talks, made contact with gay groups, had furious debates over cups of coffee, and, of course, bought the books that have not only entertained us but also shaped our politics. For Customs officers to raid GTW is for them to come into our houses and search through our lives. GTW is a part of us: Operation Tiger was a violation of who we are.

Then we got angry. Angry that our friends who work to keep the shop going should be treated like this and potentially be facing charges. Angry that our right to read gay literature is constantly being trodden on or threatened by the censors appointed by the State. Angry that despite years of hard work we remain vulnerable to those who would have us destroyed.

Gay's The Word means a lot more to many lesbians and gay men than simply being a place you can buy books that are otherwise not freely available. It is a symbol of the lesbian and gay community we strive towards: a project that has become a centre that educates, supports and nourishes the lesbian and gay community. It is a symbol of how lesbians and gay men can effectively and successfully organise to build places of our own. To allow agents of the state to attack such a visible sign of our community with impunity is tantamount to abandoning gay politics altogether.

There are other implications to the raid. Many of us feel that the action of the Customs & Excise officers is part of a wider campaign currently being escalated by the government against the gay and lesbian community. This is not the first time that a lesbian and gay bookshop has been a target. Lavender Menace in Edinburgh was recently raided, and the Adelaide bookshop in London was forced to close because of constant police harassment.

Customs have even wider powers than the police. They can enter and search any premises at any time without a warrant and take away anything they choose, such as address books, diaries and even jewellery. They use the much vaguer legal term 'indecent' to classify anything that they take exception to. Their decisions cannot be effectively challenged in open court: no jury is given a chance to hear the reasons why literature of this kind should be available, and there is no consistency amongst magistrates in their judgements.

The gay community is an especially vulnerable target to such political manoeuvres *unless* we proceed to build a campaign to resist it. A campaign centred not only within the gay community, but also amongst other minority groups, the women's and labour movements.

At the centre of this campaign isn't one isolated bookshop, nor one or two individuals; at the centre of this campaign is each and every one of us. Those who believe in the possibility of building a responsive, caring lesbian and gay community, and those of us who believe in the possibility of a just and truly democratic society.

THE TITLES

WE THINK THE WORLD OF YOU - J A Ackerley (has been published in UK)... *FORTY DEUCE*... *SONS OF HARVARD* - Toby Manotta... *A GAY DIARY 1933-46* - Donald Vining... *3 PLAYS FOR A GAY THEATRE* - Richard Hall... *SECOND CROSSING* and *ED DEAN IS A QUEEN* - Ed Diamond... *AN ASIAN MINOR* - Felice Picano... *APHRODISIAC* - Christopher Street anthology (to be published by Chatto in autumn)... *FROM VIOLENT MEN* - Daniel Curzon... *CRUISE TO WIN* - Lenny Giteck... *LOVING SOMEONE GAY* - Don Clarke... *STREETBOY DREAMS*... *YOU ARE THE RAIN* - R R Knudson... *THE JOURNEY* - Anne Cameron... *THE HUNGER*... *GAYWYCK* - Vincent Virga... *AGAINST SADOMASOCHISM* - anthology... *TRUE LIFE ADVENTURE STORIES (VOL 1 & 2)* - Judy Grahn... *INDEPENDENCE DAY* - B A Ecker... *BOM-CRIOULO* - Adolfo Caminha... *CABLE HARBOUR* - Donald Bowie... *FAMILY TRADE* - Carroll... *BACKBONE (VOLS 2 & 3)* - periodical... *FRANNY* - John Preston... *THERE MUST BE A PONY* - James Kirkwood... *TREASURES ON EARTH* - Carter Wilson... *THE WING AND THE FLAME* - Hanlon... *MADAME AURORA* - Sarah Aldridge... *FOX RUNNING* - R R Knudson... *THE BUTTERFLY* and *LOVE'S LOVELY COUNTERFEIT* - J M Cain... *THIS IS NOT FOR YOU* - Jane Rule... *TOOTHPICK HOUSE* - Lee Lynch... *THE GALLERY* - John Horne Burns... *MAKING LOVE* - Fleischer... *OTHER VOICES OTHER ROOMS* - Truman Capote... *CHOICES* - Nancy Toder... *THE DISROBING* - Royal Murdoch... *TALES OF THE CITY* and *MORE TALES OF THE CITY* - Armistead Maupin... *SUNNY SIDE OF CASTRO STREET*... *THE MARQUIS AND THE NOVICE* - Victoria Ramstetter... *RETURN TO LESBOS* - Valerie Taylor... *THE JOY OF LESBIAN SEX* - Dr Emily Sisley & Bertha Harris... *THE FOURTH WALL* - Diamond... *CUM, FLESH* and *SEX* - anthologies, Boyd McDonald (ed)... *BELOW THE BELT AND OTHER STORIES* - Samuel M Stenard (Phil Androt)... *NICE JEWISH GIRLS* - Beck... *JOURNAL OF A SOLITUDE, PLANT DREAMING DEEP, I KNEW A PHOENIX, A RECKONING* and *KINDS OF LOVE* - May Sarton... *CURIOUS WINE* - Katherine V Forrest... *LOVERS, THE STORY OF TWO MEN* - Michael Denney... *MRS PORTER'S LETTER* - O'Connell... *IF THIS ISN'T LOVE*... *JACK AND JIM* - Brogan... *CONDITIONS 7* and *CONDITIONS 8* - periodical... *GAME TEXTS* - Erskine Lane... *GAY SUNSHINE INTERVIEWS* - W Leyland (ed)... *PINES '79* - Terry Miller... *A WAY OF LOVE, A WAY OF LIFE* - Hankel... *STUDIES IN SADOMASOCHISM* - Levi Kamel... *BEEBO BRINKER, I AM A WOMAN, WOMAN IN THE SHADOWS* and *JOURNEY TO A WOMAN* - Ann Bannon... *THE STORY OF HAROLD* - Terry Andrews... *WORKING IT OUT*... *THE WINDS OF DARKOVER* - Marion Zimmer Bradley... *DEATHTRICK* - Richard Stevenson... *AGAINST THE SEASON* - Jane Rule... *BLACK LESBIANS* - anthology... *TAKING CARE OF MRS CARROL* - Paul Monette... *GAY PLAYS* - William Hoffman... *SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT* - Rita Mae Brown... *WALKING ON THE MOON* - Barbara Wilson... *TERMINAL BAR* - Larry Mitchell... *THE PRICE OF SALT* - Claire Morgan... *NIGHTS IN ARUBA* - Andrea Holleran... *COMMON LIVES, LESBIAN LIVES* - periodical... *ONE FOR THE GODS* - Gordon Merrick... *SHOW ME*...