

## How You Can Help...

Gay's The Word has received a great deal of support from the lesbian and gay communities. This has been a great boost to morale and will be even more so with the threat of charges looming. Below we give a few suggestions as to how you can help maintain the momentum of the defence campaign.

- \* **WRITE TO YOUR MP.** Tell her/him about Gay's The Word and the books that have been seized. Ask your MP to take it up with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister responsible.
- \* **WRITE TO THE NCCL.** Let them know what you feel and why you think this case raises fundamental issues of civil liberties. If you are not already a member, perhaps you could join them. Their address is: **21 Tabard Street, London SE1.**
- \* **WRITE DIRECTLY TO CUSTOMS & EXCISE.** The address is: H.M. Customs & Excise, Kent House, Upper Ground, London SE1 9PS. Quote reference GCB3B/391/84. Tell them what you think about their actions.
- \* **HELP US TO RAISE MONEY.** If you belong to a group or a club or a trade union you can help by asking them to make a donation. Maybe your pub or disco would organise a fund raising event. If you want to make a donation yourself cheques and postal orders can be made payable to 'Defend Gay's The Word' (or 'D.G.T.W.'). Perhaps you might like to make a regular donation by standing order. If you have specific fundraising skills and would like to offer us your help, please get in touch.
- \* **PUT A MOTION THROUGH YOUR LOCAL PARTY OR UNION BRANCH.** Trades Union branches have been very generous in giving financial help and political support to the defence campaign. More of both is needed. You can help by raising this with your workplace branch.

**We need more people working in the defence campaign. If you would like to get more involved you can write to us at the address below.**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Please send SAE.) I enclose £ \_\_\_\_\_ as a donation.  
Please indicate if you would like any of the following:

- ☐ information pack
- ☐ a model resolution for trade union branches
- ☐ details of how to take out a standing order
- ☐ details for obtaining speakers.

**DEFEND GAY'S THE WORD CAMPAIGN**  
**38 MOUNT PLEASANT**  
**LONDON WC1X 0AP**



## UPDATE

No 2 October 1984

On April 10, Customs officials raided Gay's The Word, London's lesbian and gay community bookshop and 'detained' all of its imported stock. This raid was widely regarded as an attack on the fundamental right of lesbians and gay men to choose what they read. A Defence Campaign was set up immediately. This update is the second in a regular series of bulletins which will keep you informed of the latest developments in the Defend Gay's The Word Campaign. The first section, below, gives details of the latest moves by Customs. The centre pages report on how we are responding and on the crucial decision of the National Council for Civil Liberties to take up our case. The back page makes suggestions about how you can help defend Gay's The Word.

Since our last Update in June, Customs officials have moved slowly - but dramatically. On 1 August they formally seized 15 copies of *Le Gai Pied*, the French national gay newspaper. This seizure has received a storm of protest both here and in Paris - it may violate EEC regulations. But the critical move came on 8 October when Customs issued 20 new seizure notices covering 132 titles and well over 2000 books. These had been detained at the ports for up to six months. The 132 titles include major works of autobiography, biography, poetry, fiction, history and counselling by authors such as Jean Paul Sartre, Edward Carpenter (incredible!), Jean Genet, Gore Vidal and Djuna Barnes. It is an astonishing range which has led NCCL General Secretary Larry Gostin to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer demanding that he receive a deputation from NCCL to discuss the seizure. The titles include many classics which are, or have been in the past, either published or otherwise widely available in this country. There is no book on the list which it would not be legal to publish in this country. UK published books are subject to the stringent laws of 'obscenity' but imported books are subject to the much more ambiguous criterion of 'indecenty'. This covers material which the average person in the street would find disagreeable or 'in poor taste'. Courts have enormous discretion in interpreting 'indecenty' and it is this anomaly which has enabled Customs to single out lesbian and gay reading in this attack.

Customs wish to interview all the directors of the bookshop and we expect rapid developments. Legal costs in fighting possible charges will be astronomical. This Update gives details of how you can help defend the lesbian and gay communities in defending themselves against this fundamental attack on basic freedoms. We will keep you informed of further developments. In the meantime we hope you will be generous in your support.



## NCCL

The National Council for Civil Liberties, Britain's only major civil liberties watchdog, have agreed to take on the legal defence of Gay's The Word. NCCL's General Secretary, Larry Gostin, has called the case '...as well as a gay rights case, a fundamental issue of civil liberties: the right to read freely, in a free society, what one chooses to read.'

NCCL has been established for 50 years. It works at screening government legislation for possible civil liberties infringements, and at testing such infringements in the courts. They have access to expert legal advisors, sympathetic MPs and Lords, and the media. At their last Annual General Meeting, NCCL decided to treat gay rights as a matter of priority. They have promised to fight for Gay's The Word as long and as hard as necessary.

To do this, NCCL have first of all taken over as Gay's The Word's solicitors. Larry Gostin has promised 'the very best legal advice available.' In addition, NCCL are helping with publicity. NCCL involvement has been reported in the *Guardian* and on BBC World Service. (The World Service want to do a longer programme at the time of court action.) NCCL help with MPs has provoked questions in the House and signatories on Simon Hughes' *Early Day Motion* about the raid. NCCL's magazine, *Rights*, gave front page coverage to the raid and is carrying a feature article in its next issue.

Larry Gostin, at NCCL's AGM, made a strong personal commitment to gay rights; the **National Executive Committee voted unanimously to adopt the Gay's The Word case.** This support has given the Defence Campaign the momentum it needs for the long fight ahead, and considerable encouragement. Responsibility for the

## REPORTBACK

### DETAILS OF DEFENCE CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Campaign still rests with the Defence Campaign, but NCCL's legal and lobbying expertise free us to concentrate on fundraising and our own publicity.

#### Fundraising

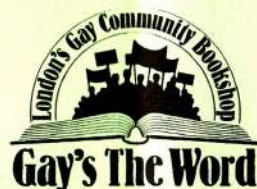
With much of the legal and campaigning work now being done by NCCL our number one priority is now fundraising. Many people across the country, both gay and non-gay, have already generously donated funds. To date we have received over £5000 – unfortunately a small amount when you consider our target – £50,000. We had intended focussing all our activities around the Customs court action which now looks as if it could be quite near. We will be circulating trade unions, gay and lesbian groups, party organisations and many individuals for donations. We will be contacting gay pubs and clubs asking them to organise benefits on our behalf. We hope to arrange a big literary event next year which would attract major authors.

However, all of this requires a great deal of organisation and we desperately need people with fundraising skills to assist us. If you can help then please contact the Defence Campaign. All of this money, and maybe more, will be needed to pay legal costs and possible fines – as yet still unknown quantities.

#### Lobbying

Support for the case from a wide range of MPs has been encouraging. A successful meeting of MPs was held at the House of Commons on 26 June. Following this a number of oral questions were put to Treasury ministers on the floor of the House on 12 July. This led to an exchange of letters between Chris Smith, Labour MP for Islington South,

and the minister responsible, Barney Hayhoe. Chris objected to the tone of the reply to his oral question in which Treasury minister Ian Stewart, replying on behalf of Barney Hayhoe, appeared to suggest that it was self-evident that our books were indecent. In replying to Chris, Barney Hayhoe argued that since in the past Gay's The Word had not contested seizures of small numbers of books (this was for practical reasons) we had conceded their indecency! The *New Statesman* described this reply as showing a 'schoolboyish misconception of the workings of Customs and Excise law' and added that Hayhoe's advisers obviously do not understand the law



either. Chris Smith, who has proved to be an invaluable supporter of Gay's The Word, is pursuing this reply on our behalf. Following the latest seizures, we will be arranging with NCCL to have a further meeting with supportive MPs to discuss how to take things further when Parliament reassembles.

#### Booktrade

In the past few months many sections of the booktrade, both mainstream and radical, have publicly endorsed the campaign to defend Gay's The Word. Support has been particularly strong amongst our publishers who are ever sensitive to the threat of censorship.

Many feel that if the attack on Gay's The Word is allowed to succeed then their own publishing programmes may be subject to interference. Publishers who have so far come to our aid include Chatto & Windus, Jonathan Cape, Thames & Hudson, Victor Gollancz, Virago, Writers & Readers and Faber & Faber.

If publishers feel threatened by Customs actions then bookshops have even more to fear. A bookseller's right to choose their own stock is staunchly defended within the booktrade. A recent article in *The Bookseller* highlighted this aspect of the campaign and has prompted The Booksellers' Association to offer its expertise and services to us. Several mainstream bookshops, including the Waterstone's chain in London, Penguin Bookshops, Read All About It in Brighton, and radical shops the length and breadth of the country, have publicly supported us.

We have not been quite so successful in our efforts to attract a wide range of authors to the campaign, although we feel that this will alter now that many more titles have been seized. To date Jill Tweedie, Francis King, Tom Wakefield, Richard Fisher and Zöe Fairbairns are among those writers whose work is stocked by GTW and who have condemned the raid.

With the number of seized titles now totalling 153 there will be many more authors both here and in the United States who will wish to support us.

There will also be many more publishers and bookshops who will hardly believe it when they read that Genet, Sartre, Vidal, Carpenter and Djuna Barnes are proscribed reading.

We hope to capitalise on their frustration to build a campaign across the

whole booktrade that will be solidly behind Gay's The Word.

#### Other raids – a wider context

Government representatives tell us that there is no campaign directed against the lesbian and gay communities. And yet everything that has happened in the past year would appear to contradict this.

The raid on Gay's The Word was followed by Customs seizures of gay books destined for Lavender Menace, Essentially Gay, Balham Food and Book Co-op and Housmans as well as stopping lesbian books destined for the Feminist Book Fair. Essentially Gay have been forced out of business by the seizures. A couple of months later, Zipper, Britain's only gay licensed sex-shop was raided by the police and much of its stock detained.

As if taking away our literature was not enough, police raids on The Bell pub and the continued use of 'pretty police' tends to suggest that even our meeting places are to be subjected to constant harassment.

Whatever the warrants, whatever the pretences, it is clear that these events are all aimed at either gay establishments or gay publications.

Now, for their autumn campaign, they have returned once again to Gay's The Word. However, these raids have done much to galvanise the gay community and it is with this support that we hope to combat these attacks.

#### Speakers

**Members of the Defend Gay's The Word Campaign have embarked upon a series of talks addressed to gay and other organisations. If your group would like someone to come and tell you more about the campaign please get in touch.**