



Briefing Note 1—Operation Tiger

In a very carefully planned and co-ordinated action, code-named 'Operation Tiger', officers of HM Customs and Excise mounted a large-scale raid on Gay's The Word bookshop in central London. The date was 10 April 1984. Gay's The Word is currently the second-largest lesbian and gay community bookshop in the world, and, as such, stocks many works imported from countries throughout the world, as well as much that is published in Britain. The imported titles, particularly those from the USA, were the target of this raid. American books are ordered from various US trade suppliers, and are sent to Britain in the publishers' standard packing, carrying the appropriate labels and Customs declarations.

Held for six hours

At 9.20 a.m. two officers of HM Customs and Excise arrived at the home of Glenn McKee, one of the bookshop's eight directors. They produced a 'Writ of Assistance', giving them general powers to enter and search, and went into the flat; they cautioned him, and proceeded to interrogate him over the next six hours. Throughout this period, Glenn was denied access to a solicitor or any outside assistance. The questions centred on the business procedures for importation, the officers having in their possession photocopies of some of the shop's written correspondence. They also thoroughly searched the flat, removing all the bookshop's records and papers they could find, including the subscription list for the shop Newsletter, and many of Glenn's personal possessions, papers, books and video tapes.

Business records removed

At 1 p.m. a second team of officers entered the shop itself. They 'advised' the Assistant Manager, Paud Hegarty, to close the shop, and told the customers inside to leave. They then began the huge task of sorting the imported titles from the British publications, over which they have no jurisdiction. They seemed overawed by the sheer quantity of books present, and had to confer by telephone with their headquarters more than once. It took them 4½ hours to sift the books, and in the end they left with over 800 volumes—a substantial portion of the total imports in stock. They also searched the files and business records, and removed many documents vital to the operation of the shop, including invoices, accounting records, address lists, and correspondence. Paud was also cautioned, and questioned extensively by the officers in the shop; he too was denied the right to contact a solicitor.

Personal belongings taken

Shortly after the officers entered the shop, Amanda Russell, the shop's Manager, arrived. She was taken off to HM Customs and Excise office in nearby Woburn Place, where she was held, cautioned, and closely questioned. That evening her flat was searched, and some of her personal books and video tapes were removed. She does not keep any shop papers at home.

Late in the afternoon, the home of one other director, Jonathan Cutbill, was raided. By then the raiding party seemed rather tired, and became

somewhat half-hearted when faced with Jonathan's house – he is a serious book collector and owns many thousands of volumes. They did not remove any of his property.

Titles seized

Since the raid all the stock has been returned except for 22 titles against which a Seizure Notice was issued on 6 June 1984.

Financial implications

If the stock seized by HM Customs and Excise was eventually to be destroyed the suppliers would still have to be paid. This could cause serious financial problems. Even when the books are finally released, a long delay between invoicing and delivery can cause 'cash-flow' problems.

£9,000 worth of stock held

No imports have arrived at the shop since the beginning of the year, and it is now clear that HM

Customs and Excise have refused clearance for all imports destined for Gay's The Word, although no official notification has been received. It is now estimated that they are withholding another £9,000 worth of the shop's stock. Clearly, the financial implications of this aspect alone are very serious.

Since all imports appear to be being blocked, including later orders of titles previously released, it is now impractical to re-order any overseas books even when existing copies are released for sale. This will reduce total stock, and therefore turnover and income.

Fear of criminal charges

One of the officers involved in the raid claimed that HM Customs and Excise may try to bring criminal charges against any or all of the people involved in running the shop. This could be very serious, and would certainly be the most devastating result for those in the shop, and others who work unpaid, regarding it as a trust for the gay community.