

All Day Conference of ^{the}Libertarian Alliance on: Censorship, Free Speech and Pornography, held on Saturday 9th August 1986 at William Goodenough House, Mecklenburgh Square, London WC2.

The first Speaker was Bill Thompson of the University of Essex, who spoke on "The Moral Right: Ideology and Campaigns". He described the various groups but said they all had the same basic membership of evangelical Christians. He said the groups all belonged to an umbrella organisation: "The Council for Christian Standards in Society".

The aim was to restore Victorian values in Britain by legislation. This was a moral backlash against the "permissive" legislation of the 1960's. The idea was the legal enforcement of Victorian morality. Amongst the general targets were the welfare state (because it tried to replace the financial responsibility of the family) consumerism (because it encourages materialism) and non-custodial sentences (because they are non-retributive).

The "Moral Majority" in Britain is well organised and directed. It is financed by small contributions by its members, not rich American backers as some secularists wrongly suspect. The work is mostly done unpaid by members. Each member is expected to write two appropriate letters of protest after going to Church each Sunday.

In this way the Moral Majority can organise immediate and effective letter-writing campaigns. Each campaign is planned well in advance and only one is conducted at a time for maximum concentration. There is a laundry list of consecutive campaigns.

1A. In 1982 the successful campaign for video censorship commenced, as planned, by the release of stories of widespread viewing of "video nasties" by school children. The plan to infiltrate and then destroy, through prosecution, the Pedophile Information Exchange (a counselling group) had also been successful. The failure of the campaign against contraceptive advice for under-aged girls brought in the name of Mrs. Gillick was in fact to the advantage of the Moral Majority without them realizing it. If the House of Lords had ruled for Mrs. Gillick the Government would have been under immense media and political pressure to change the decision by legislation so as to stop schoolgirl pregnancies. This would have broken the alliance between the Moral Majority and the Tory Leadership, since the former regard the contraceptive issue as basic. By doing her dirty work for her, the Law Lords let Mrs. Thatcher off the hook.

The members of the organisations making up the Moral Majority are mostly nonconformist "Born-again" Christians. Some, like Mrs. Whitehouse, have a "moral rearmament" background. Similar groups exist in the United States, where they have the support of President Reagan (his policy of "Social Action") but not of the legislature nor the constitution. Here the "Moral Majority" is much

more successful, because they do have the support of the Legislature and there are no constitutional safeguards against tyrannical laws.

The philosophy of the Moral Right is based on the Christian concept of collective guilt and original sin. They believe that the majority of people are immature and incapable of voluntary morality eg churchgoing. They are incapable of running their lives properly. Therefore they must be coerced by the legal enforcement of morality. This is necessary because evangelical Christians (unlike other denominations) believe that the godly are guilty for the sins of other people if they fail to prevent their immorality.

The next targets of the Moral Right in Britain would be the pop sub-culture and also "Dungeon and Dragon Games" (because they encourage black magic). The first step would be to discredit the proponents of pop culture by accusations of drug-taking. Then there would be a call for legal restrictions eg on the wording of pop records.

Bill Thompson then described the feminist movement. He said they were different in membership and aims from the "Moral Majority" and had no links with it. The feminists were far less effective because they lacked a coherent strategy and underlying ethos.

Instead of having a list of targets like the Moral Majority, the feminists concentrated on pornography. Like the MM they selected individual institutions but were less effective because they broke the law. An example was the recent arrest of feminists for criminal damage to the Curzon Cinema Club in the London Borough of Haringey.

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The feminists were also hampered by a lack of logic. For instance they are trying to close the Soho peepshow run by the Womens Co-operative of Strippers. The British Feminists have however been successful in crippling the libertarianism of the Labour Party and SDP whose members are so terrified of being labelled anti-feminist that they give in to feminist demands.

A good example was the failure of Labour MPs to oppose Claire Short's Bill against Page 3 newspaper photos and the 3,000 letters of support in one week she received as a result of a feminist letter writing Campaign. Similarly in the SDP, feminists such as Polly Toynbee were now demanding censorship.

In America the feminists were far less influential because in 1983 at the Barnard Conference they split into two hostile factions, owing to the radical feminists. In Britain such a split is coming. The English Collective of Prostitutes opposed the anti-kerb-crawling Law, whereas WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) supported it.

In any event, by their obsession with sexuality, the feminists will never have the wide-ranging aims of changing British society that the Moral Right has.

Dealing with a question on rape statistics, Mr. Thompson explained that they prove nothing, because the method of reporting had been changed resulting in an artificial rise.

Ted Goodman, solicitor and member of NCROPA (National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts) spoke on "Censorship: the Current Legal Position and the Campaigns for Freedom of Speech".

He pointed out that formal censorship in this country was imposed on video recordings and films through the Video Recordings Act 1984 and the Cinemas Act 1985. Self censorship was caused by the Obscene Publications Act; the Customs Consolidation Act 1876, and the common law offence of Conspiracy to Corrupt Public Morals.

He explained how the prohibition on the import of indecent, as opposed to obscene, material had been ended this year by the Court of the European Communities at Luxembourg. As a result H.M. Customs and Excise had discontinued the prosecution of the directors of "Gays the Word" Bookshop. He said that this advance had been offset by the conviction in December 1985 of two directors of Rendezvous Contact Magazine for conspiracy to corrupt public morals, and by the spread of obscenity convictions to non-sexual, non-violent material, so that obscenity now included the expression of ideas deemed anti-social eg the Airlift Books case when a book about drug-taking was ruled obscene.

Ted Goodman said that British television and radio was effectively censored by the Government. The Governors of the BBC and members of the IBA were appointed by the Home Office and had the legal obligation to prevent any programme which "offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling". Cable television is however merely prohibited from showing "obscene" programmes.

Mr. Goodman contrasted the position in other Western countries. He pointed out that the UK is the only country in the European Community to have video censorship and one of the only two to have film censorship. He pointed out that French code (cable) television and Italian private television stations had been liberated from the control imposed on British cable television. He also explained how Argentina and Brazil had abolished all censorship.

He ascribed the British position to the authoritarian nannyism of the Establishment and the English guilt about Sex, which prompted adulterous Tory politicians to condemn immorality.

Professor Christie Davies of the University of Reading spoke on "How our Rulers Argue About Censorship: an Exercise in Prejudice and Fallacy". He pointed out how even the proponents of legal liberalisation had not argued positively. They had used the "minimum harm" not "maximum happiness" argument. They had stated that reforms such as the legalisation of homosexuality had been justified on utilitarian not moral grounds.

Professor Davies explained how police corruption in the 1970's had been blamed on porn, whereas it was caused by the illegality of porn. The corruption was "secondary deviance" ie crime caused by bad law. Another example of such deviance was the lack of copyright over porn caused by its illegality. This had led in the United States to organised crime taking over the porn industry.

Professor Davies said that libertarians should use positive economic arguments ie that people had a basic freedom to buy and sell. Profit was a dirty word in Britain and thus prosecuted publishers always hypocritically denied a profit motive. This led in Britain to "double porn" ie porn masquerading as an attack on porn, as opposed to "good honest porn" which does not claim to be anything else.

Professor Davies also attacked the public good defence. Instead of claiming "redeeming artistic purposes" of publications, tolerance of bad things should be claimed.

He also pointed out that arguments of imitative behaviour should be attacked because pictorial publications always contained "perceived fantasy". The book by Tracey and Morrison clearly explained this.

Antony Grey, the homosexual campaigner, spoke on "Censorship Why?". He explained how he had helped found the Defence of Literature and the Art Society (now called Campaign Against Censorship) as a result of the prosecution of the publishers of "Last Exit to Brooklyn". He said the aim was to prevent interference with free communication.

4A Mr. Grey said there was no such thing as non-political censorship. All censorship was a use of power to impose one faction's wishes on others. He objected to the term "permissiveness" since it implied that liberties could only be enjoyed by permission of the Establishment. He said sex was a political topic. He gave the example of the two million pounds that the Government is spending on a publicity about Aids. When asked why the vague term "rectal sex" had been used in this publicity, the Health Minister replied that the wording "must not be offensive", thus showing his belief in the suppression of offensiveness even in health education.

Mr. Grey said the burden of proof should be on would-be censors to show that there was a greater harm than censorship. In fact censorship caused more harm than freely available porn, because it distorted the free market of information

and ideas. The Censor was a third force interposed between the Communicator and Recipient.

Censorship was harmful even if it was desired and even if used against falsehood, because its use was arbitrary and prevented free discussion. One could not have a free society without free speech. Censorship was the repression of the ideas considered dangerous by the Government. It was dishonest because this Tory Government had a rhetoric of freedom but a policy of authoritarianism.

Censorship once introduced would always spread. He quoted a German churchman speaking of the Nazis. "First they came for the Jews and I did nothing because I was not Jewish. Then they came for the gypsies and I did nothing because I was not ^agypsy. Then they came for the homosexuals and I did nothing as I was not a homosexual. Then they came for me and others did nothing".

Mr. Grey also quoted Voltaire: "I tolerate everything except intolerance". Mr. Grey said that censorship was the "Supreme Arrogance". He explained why it was on the increase. From 1966 to 1970 there was a reforming Parliament. It was on the defensive and used the "lesser evil" argument. Thus a Bishop in the House of Lords said that he thought homosexuality was a "cancer" but that legislation was a lesser evil to doing it underground.

Religious activists became alarmed at the reforms of the 1960's and in the 1970's caused the moral backlash which constipated further legal reform.

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Mary Hayward, Secretary of the Campaign Against Censorship, spoke on "~~Whores and Mothers: Ideas on Women and Obscenity~~". She said feminists were motivated by resentment of men's sexual freedom. The feminist allegations that Page 3 newspaper photos caused rape was because of their misunderstanding of male sexuality. Feminists know that men are sexually aroused by the sight of a woman's body, but do not know that men fantasise about sex. Pornography supplements prostitution as an outlet for men.

Feminists were most concerned about pictorial pornography because in their view it makes men confuse reality with fantasy. That is why feminists say "Porn degrades women" and "desensitizes men" who therefore rape. Mrs. Hayward pointed out that this was nonsense. Even children can differentiate between fantasy and reality. Only anti-porn campaigners seem to be unable to realize that porn is male fantasy material just as romantic novels are female fantasy reading. In each case the reader realises it is fiction not fact.

By portraying women as "victims" of men, feminists degrade their own sex to the status of "fragile" beings who are unequal to men. Despite their vociferance, feminists were a minority. Three thousand of them wrote to Claire Short MP in favour of her attempt to suppress Page 3 photos in newspapers. Four million people, however, including women bought and read the Sun without protest. Most women tolerated and understood men's sexual fantasizing which is what Page 3 aims to satisfy.

Mary Haywards said that in the 1960's libertarians had been overoptimistic and did not foresee the long struggle ahead nor the vehemence of the opposition to further reform.

Discussion followed each talk. Chris Tame, Secretary of the Libertarian Alliance, alluded to the recent prison sentence imposed on the editor of the National Front's newsletter for inciting racial hatred (an offence under the Race Relations Act). He said that this offence should be abolished. Only inciting crime should be an offence not inciting hatred, as otherwise there was censorship of ideas.

There was unfortunately no time to discuss the censorious effects of the Official Secrets Act. Anyway the Conference was primarily concerned with censorship based on a desire to suppress pornography.