

ISLINGTON & HARINGEY GAY GROUP
LONDON LESBIAN & GAY CENTRE
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There are an ever increasing number of organisations in this country which, whilst purporting to champion seemingly and outwardly worthy causes of one kind or another, are, in reality, in the business of promoting those which are quite unworthy and unacceptably illiberal. One way in which they 'con' the public is by giving themselves a deliberately deceptive name. Organisations like "Family and Youth Concern" (formerly "The Responsible Society", "CARE Campaigns" (formerly "The Nationwide Festival of Light"), "The Freedom Association", "The Society for Individual Freedom", "The Campaign Against Pornography AND Censorship", "The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom", and ~~more~~, ^{more recently (at least until April 22nd last)} most regrettably, the "National Council for Civil Liberties", to which we ourselves ~~were~~ ^{were} affiliated for the past eleven years but which we ~~ceased to be after~~ ^{their 1989} AGM ~~because of~~ ^{because of} ~~their~~ ^{new and extraordinary} espousal of most un-libertarian pro-censorship causes. ~~Happy that situation has been~~ ^{Happily that situation has been} ~~reversed at this year's AGM~~. "We", of course, is the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, the organisation I founded in 1976 as a freedom-fighting campaign ^{to combat} (1) Mary Whitehouse and the activities of her National Viewers and Listeners' Association (another name cleverly and deliberately designed to deceive), and (2) to fight and get rid of unjustified state censorship in this country, particularly the censorship of sexual material.

The name "National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts" may be a mouthful, but at least it is honest, some might say 'naively' honest. We've often been urged to change it ^{and} ~~having received mail addressed to an amazing assortment of distortions and variations~~ ^{give sometimes been inclined to agree} - the 'National Campaign for the Reform of Obscene Public Arts'; the 'National Campaign for the Reform of Obscene Pub Acts'; the National Camp for the Return of Obscene Public Arts' - and even our acronym 'NCROPA' hasn't remained unscathed. I've had several communications addressed to NATSOPA (the print union, I believe), several to NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) and one correspondent thought NCROPA was a contraction of 'necrophilia' and that we were in some way involved in the ghoulish delights of that bizarre activity! Nicholas Reed, a former director of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (who subsequently went to prison for two years for aiding and abetting suicides, you may remember), ^{at the NCCU AGM} heavily criticised our name as being far too long for people to remember ~~and~~ and cited his own organisation's ^{greatly enhanced} public profile after it changed its name to 'EXIT'. I asked him if he ^{was suggesting} ~~therefore~~, therefore, that we should perhaps change our name to 'SEXIT'!?

But 'SEXIT' or 'NCROPA', we ^{do} regard our mission, the establishment of true freedom of expression in this censor-saturated society, as of crucial importance to a proclaimed

'free society' which so many, so often delude themselves already exists here, but which is, in reality, ^{of course} a myth.

It was a particularly absurd Old Bailey trial ^{in 1976} which finally triggered off my inauguration of the NCROPA, although I had toyed with the idea for the previous nine years. IN fact the idea was originally conceived as far back as 1967 when I was working in a film called "Diamonds for Breakfast" on location at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, in a caravan dressing-room I was sharing with the late and much lamented ^{actor} Leonard Rossiter. ~~Rather~~ Rather than join in a poker game (I loathe cards), ^{I was reading the paper and} I lighted on yet another report of a complaint by who else - Mrs. Whitehouse, against some TV programme or other. ^{indeed} I vowed ~~that~~ I would do something about that "appalling phenomenon" (John Mortimer's apt description) and was ^{indeed} greatly encouraged to do so by Leonard. I am only ashamed that I left it so long before I put my money where my mouth was.

Howson, back to the Old Bailey trial.

In 1976 a rather small-time publisher called Heinrich Hannau had published an almost unnoticeable, rather tatty little paperback* entitled "Inside Linda Lovelace", which purported to be the ghosted biography of the star of the celebrated American 'porno-movie' "Deep Throat". For those unversed in these matters, "Deep Throat" has the somewhat fanciful storyline - and why not?, as Barry Norman would say - of the adventures of a girl, who discovers that, by an extraordinary freak of nature, her clitoris is situated in her larynx. (At least full marks for originality!) ^{Hannau was prosecuted for publishing of obscene work.} Heinrich

The outcome of this extremely costly, much-hyped Obscene Publications Acts trial was that the book was acquitted - or rather the publisher was acquitted of publishing an "obscene" publication - a vast amount of taxpayer's money had been recklessly frittered away; and the publisher, as the direct result of all the valuable publicity the trial had afforded his insignificant book, made a small fortune from its subsequent huge sales.

In this instance the accused won the day, but the case dramatically highlighted the fatuousness and the iniquities of the existence of the Obscene Publications Acts, offences against which many more are not, alas, acquitted, and which, ^{Acts} even more importantly, perhaps, impose a repressive and inhibiting 'chill factor' to many a publisher's potential plans.

In setting up the NCROPA our initial approach was to endeavour to identify just where freedom of expression, in all media, was being most effectively blocked by law, and then to spell out, loud and clear, where and how we wanted the law changed. There was no doubt that, at the core (I suppose some might say 'hard' core!) of the trouble, were the harsh, out-moded and, above all, unfair Obscene Publications Acts. Of course we were also aware that there were many other Acts or bits of Common Law which would need

revising or amending to achieve our ultimate aim for the removal of virtually all censorship for 'consenting adults' - in line with most other countries of the so-called 'free' Western World - but we believed, and still do, that if these monstrous O.P. Acts went, much of the other offending subsidiary measures would soon go too - indeed, they would have to, e.g. certain parts of cinema, postal, customs, video legislation, and so on.

In the 14 years since we were formed, whereas nearly all other Western World countries have effectively dispensed completely with our draconian, Obscene-Publications-type of measures, the situation in this country has not simply stood still, but even more censorship legislation has been enacted, and every year ever more is contemplated and added to the Statute Book - ¹⁹⁸¹ the Indecent Displays (Control) Act, the 1984 Video Recordings Act, the 1982 Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, ¹⁹⁸² the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act), ^{the 1988 Local Government Act (Section 28)} and now, presently in its Committee stage in the House of Commons, the Broadcasting Bill in which ~~it~~ is intended to extend the provisions of the Obscene Publications Acts to broadcasting and thereby subject all broadcasters to state censorship by means of that measure and the diktats of an authoritarian Broadcasting Standards Council. Even worse, the Government ~~is~~ ^{is} currently considering a strengthening - yes, STRENGTHENING - of the Obscene Publications Acts. In reply to a letter I wrote to the new Home Secretary, David Waddington, on 31st October last, the Home Office wrote, and I quote (READ) "While the results to material which is available"); and in a letter written to Conservative M.P. Teddy Taylor on 22nd January, the Minister of State at the Home Office, David Mellor, said and again I quote (READ) "For our part, we take the view that to ... with benefit be strengthened," It is already an indisputable fact that the U.K. now has more censorship - state censorship! - than any other country of the free Western World. Successive Governments here have been positively obsessed with censorship. We are already stifled by it and these latest indications from the present Government are truly horrifying and clearly indicate that this obsession has now developed into near positive derangement.

Reasons for this peculiarly British attitude are often put forward. I believe it may be generally a great deal to do with the social and historical background of this island country, where hypocrisy and snobbery is certainly ^{still} the name of the game ~~and~~, if not an endemic disease. But more specifically, as far as open support for the NCROPA's principles is concerned, I believe it is a great deal to do with ^{people} not being seen to have any association with, or any brief for (at least publicly) ^{for} what is so indiscriminately described as 'obscenity'. ^{But} The whole concept of 'obscenity' is an absurdity (and, incidentally, likewise its legal blood-brother 'indecenty' - the two

legal terms around which most of our censorship legislation is centred). This is all too clearly demonstrated by the lottery-like interpretation of both these terms by different courts and different juries. Let me cite just one classic example of this lunacy. Some years ago when private ~~cinema~~ commercial cinema clubs were not unlawful, JOHN Lindsay was a maker of sexually explicit films which were shown in his cinema clubs, in different areas of the country. He was constantly harassed by the police and faced a succession of prosecutions under the O.P. Acts, always, where possible, electing for jury trial. A batch of these films was prosecuted - the same titles, the same films - five times, in five different courts throughout the country, including one Old Bailey trial. At the first four of these trials he was acquitted, including the Old Bailey case. At the fifth trial held at Preston Crown Court, the films were found 'guilty' and he was sent to prison! The fifth jury, contrary to the other four, decided in their infinite wisdom that his films were 'obscene'. The absurdity, let alone the injustice, of the use of such terminology is blatantly apparent. It should ~~not~~ ^{never} occur in any legal statute. The absurdity is compounded in the 1959 O.P. Act, as you no doubt know, by an attempt to define the indefinable - 'obscene' being defined as that which tends to "deprave and corrupt", ^{terms} ~~words~~ which are no more ^{quantifiable or} capable of objective interpretation than is 'obscene' (or 'indecent'). The trouble is that, to the world-at-large, the ^{common} notion of 'obscenity' ^{the un-legal notion,} is something 'dirty', 'disgusting', 'shameful', certainly 'beyond the pail', - something that 'respectable' people don't have anything to do with. Sadly many people here still believe ~~that~~ (indeed, have been indoctrinated to believe) that sex and an interest in matters sexual is 'dirty'. It is this emotive response which is so played on by the Mary Whitehouses of this country, and her parliamentary poodles, and which ~~the~~ continued existence of the whole concept of 'obscenity' enshrined in British law helps to perpetuate.

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Apart from being extremely critical of the establishment, ^{we} are also, I have to say, extremely critical of all the agencies of mass communication, especially their bosses and chiefs, for allowing censorship to flourish and freedom of expression to be so eroded in this country, with so little protest or positive action to oppose it. There's ^{also} been far too much equivocation of an elitist kind ^{which} I find nauseating. ^{It's} We do not accept for one minute that Mary Whitehouse and her loud-mouthed, bible-bashing cronies are representative of the majority of UK citizens, but even if they were, minorities have their rights too. In her famous ITV Brian Walden interview last October, Margaret Thatcher declared that "freedom of expression is a fundamental part of a free society" and she was pontificating about how "We're way ahead of most other countries in our liberty, in our freedom, in our openness." Well, you could have fooled me! What colossal hypocrisy, what dishonesty with regard to the UK's record on censorship over the past ten years and over which she has ^{so intransigently} presided!

But our criticism extends well beyond Government and party lines. We are saddened and sometimes sickened by the increasingly authoritarian censorship measures being promulgated by members of opposition parties, Labour Party members in particular and, I regret to say, mostly by their women members. M.P. Clare Short's several attempts - and she promises more - to introduce her Bill to make the display of/naked or semi-naked ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ women in newspapers illegal, in other words to 'censor' what goes into a newspaper - are alarming, and, do nothing to advance the worthy cause of women's rights and equal opportunities (equal where physically and biologically possible, that is!). Even more alarming is the Bill which another Labour M.P. Dawn Primarolo is currently hawking around - the 'Location of Pornographic Material Bill' - drafted, can you believe it - by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom!

*& like Paul
Hegarty +
Campaign for
Press and
Broadcasting
Freedom*

Most worrying of all, however, are the frightening attempts by some feminist extremists to suppress completely/sexual material involving women unless it strictly conforms to certain, specifically defined formats - formats of their choosing, that is of course! What this amounts to is, ^{nothing less than} an attempt at 'thought control', a chillingly Orwellian prospect if ever I heard one. This is what is being proposed by a group, recently formed, which I mentioned earlier - the Campaign Against Pornography AND Censorship - a ludicrously contradictory title and also, of course, brazenly dishonest. To our horror, its main protagonist, an embittered 'misterogynistic' feminist called Catherine Itzin, succeeded in getting herself elected to the Executive Committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties, to which, as I've said, we ~~are~~ ^{had been} ~~since~~ affiliated. ^{for 11 years.} She persuaded its AGM last year to pass (albeit by a very narrow majority) a motion she had promoted which supported her extreme pro-censorship, anti-libertarian views. That an organisation like the NCCL should have allowed itself to be so duped, when it proudly parades its own Charter of Civil Rights and Liberties which includes Article 7 - 'Freedom of Speech and Publication', is deeply disturbing. ^{Thankfully, as the} ~~we~~ ^{said,} ~~we~~ ^{were} able to overturn that appalling decision at ~~this year's AGM on April 22nd.~~ ^{this year's AGM on April 22nd.} Feminism is one thing, but fascism - dictatorship, for that is what her proposals amount to - is quite another. We should always keep reminding ourselves - and I don't think its being over-emotive to mention it - that Hitler began his rise to power by banning and then burning books and ended up by burning people in the ovens at Auschwitz, Belsen and Dachau. Freedom of expression may not include the right to cause real, proven harm, but it does include the right to offend. It is sometimes a very good thing to offend - and often even necessary. That right is becoming more and more lost sight of.

But please don't get the idea that our opponents, the upholders of censorship, are all female. Far from it. For example Jack Straw, the Labour M.P. and Shadow Cabinet spokesman on Education (and, incidentally, a former President of the National Union

of Students in the late 60s), recently openly joined the Clare Short Bandwagon and publicly said so in an extraordinary piece in "The Times" on 25th September last. It was a piece entitled "Too soon to end these ages of innocence". He was actually complaining about a 'pop' record his nine year old son had listened to on BBC Radio 1, in which there was "a woman panting, then groaning, interspersed with the occasional mumbled phrase". It wasn't that his son had acquired any 'strange' or precocious ideas from ~~the record~~ ^{hearing it}. Merely that he ^{was} puzzled as to why so many people would ^{would be} buy such a record. Mr. Straw cited this mind-shattering incident and then other equally innocuous pursuits, as grounds for banning the availability of such material completely. It had never occurred to him, apparently, that he had the option - and right - of any responsible and concerned parent, to forbid his son from listening to BBC Radio 1 if he disapproved of it so much - or simply to switch it off! This petty little domestic incident was sufficient provocation for him then to launch into a blanket condemnation of "pornography" as being "unhealthy" and to condemn those who 'consume' "pornography" (by which I assume he meant sexually explicit material) as dangerous perverts, degenerate and worthless.

But there is nothing "unhealthy" ^{about} an enthusiastic interest in sex and the pursuit thereof. It is a perfectly natural, instinctive human phenomenon. This is, surely innately healthy, just as nutritional appetite is innately healthy. No-one castigates the free availability and vast proliferation of cookery books, even when compulsive eaters sometimes over-indulge themselves and become grotesquely (and in this case indisputably harmfully) obese! Sexually explicit books (or films, videos, pictures etc) which are mostly used as stimulæ to achieving orgasm by means of masturbation, not only do not harm anyone, but are often positively helpful by providing a useful and practical 'safety-valve' device for the relief and release of suppressed, unsatisfied and unchannelled potent sexual energy, particularly in the young. In this context, there is also a very powerful case to be made for the possible valuable use of this kind of material in averting unwanted, sometimes violent sexual attacks on unconsenting victims by the inadequate or disturbed criminal. Apart from its potential use in possibly preventing these extreme manifestations of unacceptable anti-social behaviour, sexually explicit material often provides the only possible kind of sexual outlet for the disabled and incapacitated, or, indeed, for the simply unloved, unlovely, unfortunate - or just plain unlucky! Jack Straw may be one of the lucky few who is fortunate enough to be favoured with a permanent, stable loving relationship within a family context, which is entirely self-satisfying and self-fulfilling, both sexually and otherwise, and I'm very happy for him that that is so. But need he be so smug as to deny at least some sexual gratification, however vicarious and however inferior to the ecstatic joys of the 'real thing', to those many less fortunates of the kind I've described - including myself? Yes, ladies and gentlemen. I admit it! I'll come out of the closet, and come clean (if you'll pardon the expression), I'm a wanker!

Acceptance of such pleasurable and necessary substitute sexual activities in no way reflects what Jack Straw called "a perversion in the values of society", but rather an honest acknowledgement of human sexual appetite and the crucial need for its appeasement.

One other point -

~~Furthermore~~, if some people in the so-called 'sex industry' make money out of producing the required material to appease that appetite, so what? It is simply another example of 'market forces' in operation. *and the law of supply and demand,*

Finally, the removal of legal censorship restraints on sexually explicit material does not lead to an increase in sexual crime. There is absolutely no evidence to show that it does. Quite the reverse, in fact, as continental countries, like Denmark, France and Holland have shown. And who knows? It might just ^{perhaps} help to reduce it!

Our campaign, the NCROPA, is not asking for the moon. It is simply demanding the fundamental right of all adults to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear. Most other civilised Western World countries ^{citizens} have that right. We want it too!