

The subject of the meeting: was 'The Sex Industry in Soho - a public meeting'.

The introductory statement was made by a member of the Neighbourhood Law Centre. He pointed out that there were now 160 sex establishments in Soho. He also pointed out that officers of the London Borough of Westminster had been invited to attend but had not done so. Thereupon a councillor of the Westminster City Council who was present explained that the reason for the non-attendance of officers of the Council was because they had only received two weeks' notice of the meeting and therefore had not had time to prepare for it. He pointed out however, that two councillors were present.

A representative of the Soho Society then spoke. He pointed out that the residents of Soho do not object to sex shops. He said that they merely were worried about the effect of the public displays by such shops. He compared their anxiety to the attitude of the residents of Hampstead who were opposing the conversion of most of the neighbourhood shops in that area into clothing boutiques and antique shops for visitors. He said that such developments altered the character of a neighbourhood. He said that new sex shops were opening at the rate of more than one a month i.e. over twelve a year. He said that Soho only had an area of a quarter of a square mile (i.e. half a mile wide x half a mile long). He said that therefore Soho could not take the impact of all these new sex shops. He said that if the present trend continued Soho would eventually be swamped by sex shops. He said also that their presence was causing a rise in rent and thus insecurity to other tenants i.e. a 'knock-on effect'. He said therefore that the Soho Society was asking for new by-laws and national laws and for the local authorities to make effective use of their existing powers to deal with this situation.

David Webb, organisor of NCROPA then spoke. He said that NCROPA accepted the need for controls on display and for the protection of children. He pointed out that when anybody went to live in an area they knew the character of that area before deciding to go there and would have to accept it. He said it was unfair of persons having moved into an area to demand that its character be changed to suit them. He pointed out that there was not wide-spread anxiety about this question as when the House of Commons had debated the findings of the Williams Report about this question only sixteen members of Parliament had bothered to attend. He criticised the clauses of the Indecent Displays Bill because they made no definition of the word 'Indecent' and allowed private prosecutions. He pointed out that the question of rent and neighbourhood shops closing was governed by economic market forces. He also pointed out that sex shops were wide spread in all other free western countries and therefore it was not just a London question. He pointed out that the controversy regarding this matter ^{was} purely caused because it was related to sex. He said that there was no such emotion regarding the transformation of the area in which he lived (Chelsea) with the closing of neighbourhood shops there and their replacement by shops for visitors to the area ~~because sex~~ ^{was not involved.}

Mrs Lois Pelz, a Westminster City Councillor, then spoke. She said that the sex industry was imposing itself on Soho and that 120 sex shops had opened there in three years. She said that this was degrading the environment and that was the ground on which she opposed it, not on moral grounds. She said that ten years ago Soho was like Covent Garden is now. She said that the reason why the replacement of neighbourhood shops by antique shops in Hampstead and Mayfair and the opening of many clothing

boutiques for visitors in such areas did not arouse the same controversy was because they did not repel visitors like sex shops do. She said that she supported the Indecent Displays Bill. She said that she ^{also} supported the Bill being introduced in October this year to give the G.L.C. and the London Boroughs licensing powers regarding sex shops.

Mr Hardcastle, a resident of Soho, stated that the Soho Society does not support Mrs Mary Whitehouse or her attitudes. Godfrey Gold, the owner of a sex cinema club, spoke about it. He pointed out that Soho had always been associated with the sex industry and that there had been strip clubs there since the 1930's. He pointed out that any violence that had taken place in Soho in the past was caused by gangsters and not by the sex industry. He said that he accepted the need for licensing and the need for restrictions on display and membership of these clubs. He pointed out that Mr John Lindsay his partner had had to pay £250,000 legal fees since their sex cinema opened.

Nicholas Dobson, a Westminster City Councillor and a member of the planning committee of Westminster City Council then spoke. He said that he represented St. James and Covent Garden on the Westminster City Council. He said that those areas did not yet have sex shops but they were worried that they might spread from Soho to their areas. He said that the City of Westminster Council was fully using its planning powers and that it had commenced 70 actions in the courts this year to enforce the planning laws against premises which were breaking them. He said that Westminster City Councillors had had a meeting in April this year with the Home Secretary. They had stated that they wanted the London Borough of Westminster to have licensing powers over sex shops. In response the Government had agreed to introduce the Greater London Council General Powers Bill in the next Parliament (i.e. this Autumn). He said that under the terms of this Bill the general purposes committee of the London Borough of Westminster would have the power to grant annual licences for sex establishments. He said that before granting such licences the general purposes committee would monitor the character of the applicant.

Mr Westbrook, a resident of Soho, then spoke. He pointed out that only 3,000 people live in Soho although 43,000 work there. He pointed out that all these people have rights and that although he supported the existence of sex shops and cinemas, if they took over the whole of Soho then its economic future would be in danger thereby effecting its residents and workers there.

It was then decided that there should be a further meeting to continue the discussion of the issues. It was decided that such a meeting should take place in about two or three months when the Greater London General Powers Bill had been introduced into Parliament so that the meeting could discuss it. It was decided that this meeting would again be convened by the Neighbourhood Law Centre and the Soho Society and be open to the public. It was promised that there would be longer and more wide-spread notice of this meeting.

