



## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

# N C R O P A

ORGANISER — David Webb, 15 Sloane Court West, Chelsea, London SW3 4TD — Tel: 01-730 9537

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COMMITTEE — The Viscount Norwich, F.R.S.L., Gerald Fowler, M.A.Hon., F.A.B.E.,  
E.A.C. Goodman, LL.B.(Sol), Clifford Hanley, Pamela Manson, Eric E. Miller,  
Dr. Christine Pickard, M.B., Ch.B., Dr. Brian Richards, M.B., B.Ch., William J. Wright, B.A., M.A.I.E.

The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

## NEWS MEDIA RELEASE

The NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS has requested an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister, following its meeting with the Home Secretary last Wednesday, 21st January, at the Home Office, when Mr. Whitelaw told members of its Committee that there was no possibility of any Government legislation in the present Parliamentary session, to bring some kind of sensible order to this country's present chaotic and repressive censorship laws, in the wake of the Williams Report (on obscenity and film censorship).

In a letter to Mrs. Thatcher (copy enclosed herewith), David Webb, founder and organiser of the N.C.R.O.P.A., writes of their extreme disappointment and concern that, yet again, a Government appears to be ducking this issue, particularly the present Government, formed, as it is claimed to be, and to use Mrs Thatcher's own words, by a party whose whole philosophy "is based on the freedom of the individual". The N.C.R.O.P.A. is non-party political and enjoys support from political persuasions of many kinds but, says Mr. Webb, "We are bound to say that overt Conservative support of pro-censorship causes is becoming increasingly and frighteningly apparent." It is a matter of grave public concern. Two weeks ago, in Exeter, magistrates ordered 500 books and magazines to be burned, including reproductions of works by Pablo Picasso, Aubrey Beardsley and other artists of internationally acclaimed repute. We should do well to remember that Hitler began by book burning — and ended up by burning people!

David Webb has also asked for a meeting with Tim Sainsbury, M.P., to voice the N.C.R.O.P.A.'s fears about his private member's Bill on so-called "indecent" displays, which receives its second reading in the Commons this Friday (30th Jan.) As presently constituted, the Bill would have very serious repercussions for newsagents and bookshops throughout the country, many of which would undoubtedly be put out of business if it were passed. Even newspapers like "THE SUN" and the "DAILY STAR" could be at risk, since the Bill makes no attempt to define "indecent" and no consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions would be required before a prosecution could go ahead. The "Puritan Brigade" will be able to have a field day, hounding out even the most innocuous publication and thereby denying innocent pleasure to millions. The N.C.R.O.P.A. has already pointed out the Bill's serious defects to Mr. Whitelaw and he has promised to consider them carefully, although any "piecemeal" legislation of this kind is regretted, prior to comprehensive Government legislation to reform all censorship laws in this country.

ENDS.

THIS RELEASE IS EMBARGOED UNTIL 0100 HRS. ON FRIDAY, 30TH JANUARY, 1981



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NO/DAW/DP

28th January, 1981.

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,  
Prime Minister,  
10, Downing Street,  
London, S.W.1.

Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

Last Wednesday, January 21st, members of the Committee of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (N.C.R.O.P.A.) had a personal meeting with the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Mr. William Whitelaw, to discuss the following issues:-

- (1) The Williams Report, its merits and defects, as we see them,
- (2) The way in which certain pro-censorship factions are mischievously and improperly attempting to discredit that Committee's findings and the integrity of its distinguished members,
- (3) Our concern that fourteen months after the publication of the Report, there has still been no Government action or even indication of intention to introduce legislation which will allow consenting adults in this country the freedom to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear, just as they do in nearly all other countries of the so-called free Western World.

We received a courteous and attentive hearing but, afterwards, the Home Secretary told us that he holds out no hope whatsoever of any Government legislation in this field in the present Parliamentary session.

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We are extremely concerned by this statement and the prospect of the "status quo" remaining, for the next year at least, is a deeply depressing thought. Successive Governments have been ducking this issue for many years but we had hoped that, with a Government formed by a political party so totally dedicated to the freedom of the individual, the time would be ripe for the long-overdue liberalisation of our out-moded laws.

The N.C.R.O.P.A. is non-party political and enjoys support from political persuasions of many kinds. We are bound to say, however, that overt Conservative support of pro-censorship causes is becoming increasingly, and frighteningly, apparent. The Home Secretary has said that he is opposed to censorship, in company with many other prominent members of your party when publicly championing the party philosophy. In a letter to me dated 17th May 1978, Mr. Whitelaw said:-

".... but I must emphasise once again that nothing I have said could possibly justify talk of censorship"

He was referring to his speech to the Annual General Meeting of the National Viewers and Listeners' Association in Birmingham on Saturday, 13th May 1978. Sir Geoffrey Howe, in his Budget Speech to the House of Commons on 12th June 1979 said:-

"We need to enlarge freedom of choice for the individual"

Mr. James Prior speaking on the BBCTV "Nationwide" programme on 29th March 1979 said:-

"Greater individual freedom" (is the aim of the Conservative Party)

Mr. Edward du Cann speaking on BBC Radio 4's "Any Questions" on 23rd July 1977 said:-

"There's too much regulation in this country at the present time over too many things".

Mr. Eldon Griffiths, writing in his Conservative Political Centre booklet "Fighting for the Life of Freedom" (which contains the following dedication "To Margaret Thatcher, a freedom-fighter!") says:-

...../continued

"Compared with most other nations, the British still enjoy an enviable degree of freedom - of expression, of assembly, of movement and, within certain limits, of property. Yet the sad truth is that most British people today enjoy less real personal freedom than do most Americans, Canadians and Australians; indeed, in important aspects, we are less free than the West Germans!"

You, yourself, said, in the BBCTV "Panorama" programme on 11th January 1977:-

"The whole philosophy of the Conservative Party is based on freedom of the individual"

and on the BBC Radio 2 "Jimmy Young Show" on 31st January 1979:-

"The liberty of the subject is the Conservative philosophy".

If you and your colleagues really believe in these fine sounding phrases, one is bound to ask why you are so unwilling to take action to see their message fulfilled. We appreciate the Home Secretary's reluctance to introduce legislation into the House "which could not possibly succeed", but, with the substantial majority your party presently enjoys, why should you fear such an outcome? Members of Parliament taking the Conservative whip would surely be bound to vote in favour of anti-censorship legislation. If they were to vote otherwise, they would surely be betraying the creed of their own party and the platform on which they have been elected to office.

Th N.C.R.O.P.A. simply does not accept that the majority of the British people supports puritannical restrictions on its behaviour, no matter what a highly-organised, vociferous minority of self-appointed guardians of the nation's morals may try to assert. We shall continue to pursue our eminently sensible cause undeterred. May I therefore respectfully request an urgent meeting with yourself to discuss this untenable situation and to try to persuade Her Majesty's Government to re-assess its priorities so that the time and inclination will be found to bring some reasonable kind of order to the chaotic censorship laws in this country and thus bring us into line with most other Western countries which have long since had the good common sense to dispense with the kind of repressive legislation to which we are still subject.

...../continued

May I conclude with two further quotes from yourself. In the foreword to the 1979 Conservative Party Manifesto, you wrote that:-

"No one who has lived in this country during the last five years can fail to be aware of how the balance of our society has been increasingly tilted in favour of the State at the expense of individual freedom. This election may be the last chance we have to reverse that process, to restore the balance of power in favour of the people."

After nearly two years in office, are we not entitled to ask when this reversal will begin to show signs of having taken place, because the Government's inaction over the vexed question of censorship certainly does not bode well for the future. We very much regret this gloomy prediction, and trust, most fervently that it is wrong. The one certain thing is that our campaign will continue as long as necessary and we shall be guided by your own wise words, from the BBCTV "Panorama" programme on 11th January 1977, in so doing:-

"You don't tolerate absence of freedom. Your only choice is to fight for it."

I do hope that you will accede to my request for a meeting as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,  
Organiser,

National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts