

From: David Avery, M.A., D.Litt., LL.D.
City of Westminster Representative on
the Inner London Education Authority
Opposition Leading Member on Further and Higher
Education Sub-Committee

MEMBERS' LOBBY
THE COUNTY HALL
LONDON SE1 7PB

DA/br

4 June 1981

David Webb, Esq.,
National Campaign for the Reform of the
Obscene Publications Acts,
15 Sloane Court West,
Chelsea,
London SW3 4TD.

Dear Mr. Webb;

Your letter addressed to me at the County Hall, referring to "the persecution of London's sex shops and cinemas" surprised me by its inaccurate statements, omissions of fact and the slipshod way in which you treat the views expressed by a number of people of whom I am one.

You refer to the sex-cinemas which "have been subjected to almost constant harassment by the authorities." You do not refer at all to the way in which the majority of these establishments have ignored planning regulations or have (by their conduct of their business) created a whole range of problems for local residents. Prosecutions for illegal acts under town-planning statutes or with regard to displays have come about because the local authorities involved and the public do not see why they should be given immunity for flagrant offences for which any other business would expect to be prosecuted. Incidentally, in the Guardian advertisement it was stated that these cinemas "accept the need for control of front of house displays so that casual passers-by are not confronted by matter that some of them might consider offensive." You must know that is not true of the majority of these places. Those which have been prosecuted and convicted following complaints by local residents have normally re-instated the offending material at the first opportunity.

In your letter you ask "whose environment is at risk?" as a result of the growth of sex-establishments. Clearly you and the distinguished gentlemen whose names top your notepaper know nothing of what has been happening in the West End, and care nothing for the environment in which large numbers of people have to live and work. You deny that the growth of the sex industry has forced small firms and shops out of business, yet the evidence is there for countless premises in Soho. Dozens of small businesses have been forced to close by landlords demanding sex-industry rents or - worse still - by real harassment by unscrupulous landlords who have sex-industry connections. Not only businesses, too, but elderly residents who have been driven from their homes by thugs because their flats have been seen as desirable extensions of illegal sex-shops etc.

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You refer to "the puritans from the pro-censorship lobby", which is in itself a lie when applied to those who are demanding restrictions. I and everyone else connected with Soho have said time and time again we are not in favour of censorship, but of workable controls over external and window-displays, and to give teeth to the legislation governing illegal use of premises under the planning acts. We have frequently declared that we are not interested in what happens inside shops and cinemas, but with their outward manifestations and the effect they (and the strong-arm boys who run many of them) have on local residents, workers and visitors.

May I conclude by suggesting that you and your colleagues come to Soho to discover for yourself the appalling things being done by those people whom you are so anxious to protect? I should be happy to try and organise a meeting so that you can meet some of the local residents who have suffered at the hands of your friends.

Yours truly,

David Avery

Dr. David Avery
GLC Member, City of London and Westminster South.

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