

**N**o Sex Please, We're British! remains as true today as it was a century ago when Flaubert's English publisher was sentenced to six months imprisonment in London for obscenity. In the same year the author was awarded the 'Legion d'Honneur' in Paris.

The contrast between Britain and other European countries in this respect has never been more glaring. The reform of laws dealing with sexually explicit material was accomplished in the Continental countries without controversy as part of a general liberalisation which started to sweep across Europe in the 1960's. In Britain, by contrast, the mere mention of pornography in the House of Commons causes the Pavlovian reflex of Members of all Parties springing to their feet and shouting 'Ban it!' (never 'Legalise it!').

Britain is committed to continuing to criminalise sexually explicit material. The Conservative 1992 General Election Manifesto stated that the U.K. had the strictest laws against pornography in Europe. It promised that the Party would maintain them. This is one of the reasons why the British Government insists on retaining Customs control on inter-European Community travel after January 1st 1993. On that date other Community countries implemented the Customs-free single internal European Market. By contrast, in its News Release of March 1992, HM Customs described the importation of pornography into the United Kingdom as 'a danger to society.'

It's not just the Tories who are committed to this policy. On June 23rd 1992 a House of Commons Motion was tabled by a Liberal MP calling for the obscenity laws to be widened so as to prohibit the 200 year old novel *Juliette* by de Sade. Over one hundred members signed it, and nearly half of them were Labour. When the Campaign Against Censorship wrote to each of them pointing out that the book was lawful throughout the rest of Europe, all remained unrepentant. One Labour MP replied: 'Filth is filth, even if it's 200 years old.'

To appear respectable, members of the 'Establishment', whatever their political persuasion, feel that they must be seen to condemn 'filth.' This is irrespective of what they do in their own private lives. The truth is that British Members of Parliament are frequently sexually promiscuous. Half are divorced because of adultery. Some others are practising homosexuals, including several Tory members, some being front-benchers, as was stated without contradiction by Jack Straw MP, in a House of Commons debate on Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill in 1988. As Somerset Maugham said 'Hypocrisy is a whole time job.'

In their replies to the Campaign Against Censorship's letter of protest about the *Juliette* motion in 1992, several MPs admitted that they had read the book (or at



The British attitude to sex is still motivated by the wish to prevent its enjoyment. Will the UK, including its anti-pornography feminist lobby, ever grow out of that immature insular guilt about sexuality? Ted Goodman writes



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# GUILT WITHOUT SEX

least selected excerpts) and had not thereby been deprived. Nonetheless they stated that they did not want the work to be 'generally available' as other people (lesser mortals presumably) might be deprived by it. The British 'Establishment' retains a superior colonial attitude to the lower orders, whom it continues to treat as uncivilised 'natives' needing to be protected against themselves.

Such prudery is reinforced by the feminists of the Labour Left (Clare Short

and her supporters), who in the same nannyist vein advocate the criminalisation of all material which 'degrades women', or rather, which they believe degrades women - that is, all heterosexual pictorial erotica. Female participants in the production of such material take the opposite view. The millionairess topless Page 3 model, Samantha Fox, stated of the tabloid papers which featured photos of her: 'They don't exploit me, I exploit them!'



The root of the problem is British upbringing. Children in this country are taught that sex is dirty, on a par with excreting, and that it is not respectable to admit publicly to being interested in such a 'disgusting' activity. This is reinforced by the disciplinarian English education system. Until 1987 corporal punishment was used in most British schools and, by virtue of the Education (No 2) Act of 1986, is still lawful in private schools (where the majority of MPs were educated). No other country in Europe permits it. Corporal punishment was abolished in France in 1885. That is why sado-masochism is known there as *Education Anglaise!*

Religion may explain the differing attitudes. Christine Ockrent, a leading French broadcaster, when questioned recently about the contrast between the freedom of French broadcasting vis-a-vis the

festivities) motivated by the wish to prevent its enjoyment by the spectators, *not* for animal welfare.

Similarly, when the Waltz became popular in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century, the embracing position taken by the couples so shocked the British sense of public decorum that the dance was not accepted in ballrooms here until 1812, over a decade after the rest of Europe! In the same vein, English Christmas pantomime adopted the convention of having a transvestite principal boy, because it was unacceptable for a female to reveal her legs in public. This happened at the end of the 19th century, the very time that Paris theatres began to feature the 'Can-Can'!

Hostility to commercialised pleasure-seeking still pervades political attitudes. During recent debates on the obscenity laws (British parliamentarians are obsessed by

did not apply in France as then he would only have homosexual Ministers! The process was repeated in 1992 with the resignation of David Mellor, the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Will the British psyche ever grow out of its immature insular guilt about sexuality? This will only happen when public figures in this country have the moral courage to stop playing the game of English hypocrisy and give up pandering to prudery.

Meanwhile, the struggle for a change of national attitude to achieve the legalisation of sexually explicit material is continued by libertarians. But their organisations are deliberately denied a public hearing by a hostile media. The media instead plays the grundyst game quoting every utterance of Mrs Whitehouse, whom it has raised to the status of a national institution. She is regularly quoted by the press and frequently invited to appear on television and radio, while her opponents are not. Conservative politicians and other Establishment figures believe there are more votes in espousing 'Victorian Values' than the cause of freedom of expression.

The dispirited opposition parties are weak and divided on this issue (as on so many others). The long period of continuous Tory rule has deprived them of positive reformist zeal. Any libertarian sentiment in their ranks is counteracted by the anti-pornography feminist lobby, although its influence is on the wane.



strict State controls on the content of British television, explained that one had to take account of Protestant cultural constraints. She was right.

Predominantly Catholic countries, with their tradition of confession and attendant expiation, are much more tolerant of sexuality than cold, unforgiving Protestantism. This is especially true of the evangelical attitudes of Mrs Mary Whitehouse and her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, who believe they have a moral duty to save people from their own lust.

This Puritanism dates back to the Cromwellian era. The historian Macaulay observed that the outlawing of bear-baiting in 1652 was (in the same spirit as the previous abolition of Mayday and Christmas

the subject and debate it almost annually), Tory MPs complained that as people made money out of this 'filthy trade', it must be stopped. Mythical 'evil porn barons' are part of English demonology. Labour feminists complain that men are sexually aroused by this material and therefore it should be banned. In their eyes, anything which gives men sexual pleasure is evil!

Gratifying one's desire for money and/or sex is wrong in the mind of the British Establishment. This is the opposite of the hedonistic Continental *joie de vivre* attitude, which believes in pleasure-seeking, not State imposed denial. Thus when Cecil Parkinson resigned from the Cabinet because of his mistress in 1983, President Mitterand said he was glad the same rule

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Thus in 1992, after Labour's defeat in the General Election, Marjorie Mowlem (Labour's spokesperson on Women's Affairs) announced it had dropped the commitment to outlaw 'Page 3' photos in the newspapers, on the grounds that such pin-ups had proved popular and harmless. The decision may have been influenced by the fact that the hostility of the tabloid press to the 'killjoy' Labour Party had contributed to its defeat.

One can only hope the time-lag of over a century between the French and British legalisations of homosexuality will not be repeated regarding 'pornography'.

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