

SPESES

South Place Ethical Society

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J A N U A R Y

SUNDAY MORNING LECTURES

11.00 a.m. IN THE LIBRARY AT CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, W.C.1.

10th	DR.HARRY STOPES-ROE	THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION
17th	T.F.EVANS-	SHAW, THE BLACK GIRL AND THE PUBLIC
24th	GEORGE THEINER (INDEX ON CENSORSHIP)	IN DEFENCE OF INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM
31st	HAROLD BLACKHAM	THE CONTROL OF VIOLENCE

SUNDAY AFTERNOON FORUMS

3.00 p.m. IN THE LIBRARY AT CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, W.C.1.

10th	DAVID WEBB	CENSORSHIP - THE REAL OBSCENITY
24th	BARBARA SMOKER	ANTI-POPE - THE POPE IN PERSPECTIVE

A D M I S S I O N F R E E

10/1/82
& 12/2/82 (A)

CENSORSHIP - THE REAL OBSCENITY

It was in the so-called "swinging sixties", I believe, that Roy Jenkins, as the then Home Secretary, made his now famous comment that what many from the "Puritan Brigade" were condemning as the development of the "permissive society", he preferred to regard as the "civilised society". I believe that that was one of the sanest remarks ever made by a politician. It is unfortunate, however, that the "permissive society" tag seems to have stuck, whereas the "civilised society" tag has virtually disappeared. Although as things have turned out, neither label is anything like apposite for the situation we find ourselves in today. I never did like the term "permissive society" because it gives the impression that what society now permits, but which previously forbade, is automatically bad, whereas I see it rather as a returning to the people what they originally and naturally possessed, i.e. freedom and truth, which had in the process of time and alleged "progress", been taken from them.

Roy Jenkins' vision of the "civilised society" has sadly not materialised, and instead of the rightful return of those inherent gifts of freedom and truth, our present society appears to be rapidly reverting to the viscerously restrictive standards of the past. Instead of more "permissiveness", more "civilisation", and thus more freedom, individual liberty is daily being eroded in this country at a truly alarming pace, and in no area more insidiously than that concerned with freedom of expression and censorship. The highly-organised, vociferous pro-censorship factions, in their role as self-appointed "guardians of the nation's morals", have, for far too long, succeeded in forcing their minority opinions on the much more liberal-minded, tolerant majority, often using highly emotive, factually inaccurate propaganda to help spread their repressive and bigoted doctrines. Parliament goes on paying them heed out of all proportion to the numbers they represent and, in consequence, continues to do nothing to even check their advance, let alone turning them in retreat by introducing the drastic, comprehensive, liberalising changes to our draconian censorship laws which are so desperately required to bring them in line with up-to-date, twentieth-century public opinion.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of harmless books and magazines are being seized by the authorities and destroyed. Thousands more films and video cassettes are also being impounded and confiscated. Thousands of valuable and costly police man hours are being wasted on these ludicrous and futile exercises, often carried out by some police chiefs with a fanatical zeal more appropriate to a mediaeval witch-hunt, and at a time when, for example, many old people are too frightened to go out in the streets at night and most police forces are still under strength and in the Metropolitan Police force still seriously under strength. No doubt

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the James Andertons of this world (chief constable of Greater Manchester as if you didn't know!) can sleep soundly in their beds at night, happy in the knowledge that, whereas vulnerable old ladies are being brutally attacked on the streets and frequently in their own homes, for the meagre contents of their handbags, at least no-one on their patches will run the terrifying risk of possible exposure to the appalling depravity and corruption of so-called "obscene" magazines! Now that's what I call having a real sense of priorities! Megalomaniac police-chief bigots, like Anderton, however God-like they may see themselves, can ^{however,} only implement laws which are available to them. Whilst so many repressive, bad old laws, and, it would seem, may bad new ones, too, remain on the Statute Book, they will always be able to make the old familiar claim that they are simply enforcing the law impartially, which is their job. The present Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, has said on more than one public occasion, that there are far too many laws in this country, and amongst these, I would suggest, are the many which help to perpetuate unnecessary and out-moded censorship restraints. These dangerous Puritan-Brigade-backed weapons must be removed from the law enforcement agencies' arsenals. They must no longer have them at their disposal and they must no longer be allowed to "censor" what we, as responsible adults, choose for ourselves to see, read and hear. It was with these deeply felt sentiments in mind that the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts came into being and why I founded it nearly six years ago in April 1976.

Although there were a number of other individuals or organisations, usually of what I would describe as a "God-bothering" nature, which raised my hackles every time they opened their predictable mouths in frequent protest against what I saw as the innocent and innocuous pursuits of others, it was, I freely admit, the activities of, in the words of Q.C. and playwright John Mortimer, "that appalling phenomenon" Mrs. Mary Whitehouse which roused me to real heights of anger and outrage. In her earlier days of interfering public busy-bodding and nosey-parkering, she was generally treated as a huge joke. I believe this was regrettable, because whilst the majority of the public at large were ridiculing her, many pious, self-righteous figures of the Establishment were giving her credence and using their support of her extreme views as an endorsement of their public "respectability" - 0 ghastly word! I never have found Mrs. Whitehouse funny - pathetic, perhaps, tragic, perhaps - but never funny. ~~But~~ Dangerous, certainly and always. Since her prosecution of Denis Lemon, the editor of "Gay News", for blasphemy and, more recently, her vindictive private prosecution, under the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, of Michael Bogdanov, National Theatre director of "The Romans in Britain", I now also find her evil, and I make absolutely no apology whatsoever for saying that. If actions of that kind are typical of those who make great public play of their

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devout Christian beliefs, with their powerful emphasis on love and human compassion, then, again in John Mortimer's words, thank God I'm a "devout atheist".

Chiefly, then, with Mary Whitehouse in mind, the frustration built up, since there did not appear to be a really effective 'platform' of any kind to combat the Whitehouse pontifications. The idea of actually forming an organisation to do this very thing, however, came to me one day in a caravan, in front of Blenheim Palace. The caravan was a mobile film location dressing-room and the film, a rather unsuccessful one as it turned out, even though it was Marcello Mastroianni's first British film, was being made partly in the Palace. My two actor colleagues sharing the caravan were Bryan Pringle and one Leonard Rossiter - alias Reggie Perrin, alias Mr. Rigsby for those who are TV addicts. They were playing cards (something which bores me silly) and I was reading "The Guardian". It wasn't long before I soon came across the inevitable Whitehouse piece, a report of yet another of her miserable exploits. I remember reading it out aloud to them and vowing to do something to fix her once and for all. "Why don't you?", they said. "It's about time somebody did. You organise it and we'll support you". To my shame I regret to say that it was not until some years later, in 1976, that I put my money where my mouth was, metaphorically that is, and set about the task. If you'll forgive me for mixing my metaphors, the last straw which broke the camel's back came in the form of an extraordinarily silly prosecution under the Obscene Publications Acts of a rather tatty little paperback called "Inside Linda Lovelace" - this is it - in an Old Bailey trial which at times looked like rivalling its much more celebrated predecessor, the Lady Chatterley's Lover Trial, some sixteen years earlier. The Linda Lovelace of the book is, of course, the Linda Lovelace of "Deep Throat" - fame, the now almost legendary American hard-core sex film, which is, incidentally, still showing in New York some thirteen years after it first opened, whilst we here in censor-ridden Britain, are still legally forbidden to see it. The defendant in the trial, publisher Heinrich Hannau, was, of course, acquitted of publishing an "Obscene" book for gain (that is one which would ~~be~~ "tend to deprave and corrupt" those who might read it) and, thanks to the enormous amount of free publicity afforded by the trial, made a considerable amount of money out of a singularly undistinguished publication, which otherwise would have remained almost unnoticed on the shelves. Reprints, of course, had to be rushed out and the whole ludicrous business cost the British tax-payer more than £100,000 in legal costs. I could stand no more. I put pen to paper and wrote to the then "Evening Standard" urging anyone else thus incensed to contact me without delay. The considerable response spurred me on and the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts was born. At least, that isn't absolutely correct. Its original title was National Campaign for the Repeal of the Obscene Publications Acts but

this was later changed to Reform in order to give a more accurate reflection of our aims which have remained unchanged. (Whilst we're on the subject of names, when I was attending last year's Annual General Meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties, to which the N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated, there was a discussion about the possibility of re-naming the N.C.C.L. Nicholas Reed, formerly of "EXIT", the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, was speaking and telling how much more widely known they had become since being known as "EXIT". He cited our own name as a terrible mouthful, which I accept it is. I asked him what he would like us to do about it - change it to "SEXIT", perhaps?! Well maybe we should. At present, however, we're usually known as NACROPA for short but even that gets misinterpreted. On at least three occasions it has mistaken for a contraction of Necrophilia!)

Something of which to assume you, I have no first hand knowledge!

NACROPA's aims have been simple and straightforward from the outset, as a law reform pressure group ideally should be. We believe that every adult should have the right to see, read and hear whatever he or she chooses for him or herself, in the absence of any reliable evidence that sexually explicit material (or what some would call "obscene" or "pornographic" material) of whatever kind, is harmful. We believe that this is also true of depicted violence. Virtually no really reliable or credible evidence has been produced that so-called "obscene" material causes actual harm. On the other hand evidence that it is harmless, and, indeed, often positively helpful, is massive and overwhelming. Every major investigation undertaken into the subject over the past fifteen years has come to that same conclusion. These include the Danish Forensic Medicine Council's Report to the Danish Penal Code Council in 1966; the Arts Council of Great Britain's Report on the Workings of the Obscene Publications Acts in 1968, the exhaustive, two million dollar United States Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in 1970 and, of course, nine years later, the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (the Williams Committee, *a distinguished Committee by any standards and under the chairmanship of Bernard Williams* ~~and about which Professor Williams spoke here last October~~). They all reached the unanimous conclusion that so-called "obscene", or "pornographic" or, as I prefer to call it, sexually explicit material should be freely available to consenting adults. That phrase "consenting adults", together with another of similar brevity, "no coercion", has permeated and coloured all NACROPA thinking ~~on this matter~~ throughout. Obviously where children are concerned in sexual material, coercion would be inevitable. We, of course, condemn most vehemently such material and that is why we have always supported measures for the "protection" of children. We also go along with certain limited measures for the "protection" of those adults who do not wish to be forcibly affronted by material that they would deem offensive. But I do stress the word "limited". I believe that it is often a very good thing for people to be shocked sometimes. The Indecent Displays (Control) Act, which came into force on October 27th last year, was a

