

Speech Prepared for Lambeth Council Meeting 5th Jan. 1989

but invitation subsequently withdrawn & not delivered

As the honorary director of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, may I thank the Lambeth Borough Council for this opportunity of explaining our opposition to the imposition of the Council's new licensing restrictions for all premises, including public-houses, which host entertainment in the course of which performers remove their clothes - in a word 'strippers' - and which this Council voted through without a single word of discussion or debate on November 9th last.

I know that some members of the Council here present will be speaking on the more commercial implications of these new restrictions and their effect on some of their constituents' livelihoods, so I will mainly concern myself with the implications they will have for the consumer, the customer, the 'punter', who freely desires, chooses and seeks this kind of entertainment.

The re-designation of all premises which publicly stage 'strip' acts as "sex encounter establishments" and the introduction of an annual licence fee of (at present rates) £13000, in place of the present music and dancing licence fee of at most, I believe, £900 (and that would be for the largest cinema or theatre type of venue) is, by any standards, outrageous. Such an exorbitant 1300% plus increase cannot possibly be sustained by the vast majority of small business entrepreneurs, like pub landlords, who, especially in a borough like Lambeth, are <sup>most</sup> likely to provide the main source of leisure and recreational facilities for the customer who wishes to avail himself of the kind of easy, pleasant, titillating, sometimes amusing, perhaps erotic, and, yes, often exciting - but always harmless entertainment - that the unclothed human body can often provide. And, as Barry Norman might say, "And why not?".

Why not, indeed? The council have been unable to put forward a single <sup>credible</sup> reason why they should suddenly wish to impose such unwanted, unnecessary and harshly authoritarian measures, measures which would do credit to <sup>a</sup> Mary Whitehouse or even the Ayatollah Khomeini himself. In my conversations with Council officials I have been informed that there have been no problems with such premises in the past, that no unsolicited complaints have been received about them and that, in any case, there are currently very few such establishments operating within the Borough. The police, I understand, are also quite satisfied with the present situation, although we should always keep in mind that the role of the police in these matters is only <sup>the police's</sup> concern for the maintenance of law and order - and not for private morals or their own particular views on these.

But neither is it the business of this or any other local authority to dictate a common standard of individual morals. However, this appears to be the only possible

explanation for Lambeth Council's suppression of 'strippers'. Your Chair of the Health and Consumer Services Committee, Councillor Pauline Watson, gave the game away during an interview for Greater London Radio on November 9th last when she said, and I quote, "The people of Lambeth basically do not want any form of sexual exploitation of the female/stroke/male race, male gender", unquote. I suggest that what Councillor Watson was really saying was that she herself doesn't like 'strippers', that she believes them to be sexually exploited and that she had exploited her position as Chair of the Health and Consumer Services Committee to seduce a gullible and anti-libertarian Council into rubber-stamping her own, highly subjective preferences.

Notwithstanding that strippers are not exploited anyway, they are paid professional entertainers - some of them very well paid - who have freely chosen to undertake that kind of work, I would like to know exactly on what basis Councillor Watson makes her claim? If the people of Lambeth don't want this kind of entertainment, they will stay away and market-forces will do the rest. I am glad she was careful to mention the "male gender" too, because these iniquitous new licence fees will not only affect heterosexual venues, but also homosexual venues where male strippers often perform for the harmless entertainment and enjoyment of 'gay' minorities. Minorities have their rights too. Women's hen-nights also often employ and enjoy the services of male strippers. Does the Council really want to put an end to such innocent fun?

For let's make no mistake. If an extortionate £13000 'sex encounter establishment' licence requirement is implemented in the borough, it will be the end of such local entertainment in Lambeth completely. It is blatantly dishonest of the Council to claim that it has not banned strippers, when it has effectively equalled that by pricing them out of ~~business~~ business. That is censorship by the back-door, and it is disgraceful. The Council's <sup>harmful</sup> action is yet another 'coffin-nail' in the cause of individual freedom in this increasingly authoritarian and depressing country, where we already have more censorship than in any other country of the so-called 'free' Western World. I strongly urge the Council to reconsider fully the implications of what they have put their name to, to demonstrate that they are not a gullible, anti-libertarian, kill-joy lot, and beg them to reverse their previously unvoiced decision of November 9th. Please don't asset-strip the <sup>Lambeth</sup> stripping assets.