

ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT BY A DELEGATION OF MEMBERS OF
"THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE
PUBLICATIONS ACTS" TO THE GREATER

LONDON COUNCIL ON THE 1st JULY 1983

The delegation consisted of Mr Edward A. C. Goodman (Member of the Committee of the "National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts"), Mr. Eric Miller (Member of the Committee of NCROPA)

and Mrs. Fanny Cockereil. They were received by three members of the Greater London Council, namely: Mr. Ken Little GLC (in the Chair), Mr. Branagan GLC, and Mr. Gent GLC, supported by members of the GLC staff including the leader of the GLC Women's Rights Monitoring Group.

Miller pointed out that, as a result of his enquiries, he had discovered that nearly all the cinema clubs in the West End had been refused licences. He explained that if cinema clubs were not granted licences then the question of what films they could show would not arise and Parliament's intention would be frustrated. Edward Goodman added that Peter Lloyd MP, who had introduced the legislation for the licensing of cinema clubs, had assured NCROPA that it was intended to be regulatory not prohibitory. Mr Gent GLC replied that the GLC would not grant licences to "crooks". Mr. Miller said that the Magistrates' Courts had done so regarding betting-shops and that the whole idea of licensing cinema clubs was to give a legitimate regulated outlet to pornographic films instead of driving them underground.

Mr. Little GLC stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the GLC's powers of film censorship rather than the licensing of cinema clubs. Edward Goodman pointed out that the fact that public cinemas could not show films classified by the British Board of Film Censors as being in the 18R category, did not mean that the GLC needed to insist that cinema clubs could only show films in that category. He explained that Section 53 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 stated that the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions was required before films were prosecuted for obscenity and that such consent would not be given if a film had been passed by the British Board of Film Censors and placed in the 18R category. If however cinema clubs chose to show films which had not been certified by the British Board of Film Censors, then they took the risk of a prosecution for obscenity being authorised by the Director of Public Prosecutions. In other words, the general law applied and there was no need for the GLC to try and impose additional restrictions on the content of films by using the cinema club licensing scheme.

Mr. Gent GLC pointed out that the general law was defective in that prosecutions for certain types of racist and terrorist films were not possible. Mr. Goodman answered that if this was unsatisfactory then the remedy was to seek a change in the law by Parliament and not to use the licensing system to effect this. He added that to impose the requirement of obtaining a British Board of Film Censor's licence for each film shown in a cinema club, with the attendant delay and expense, would make such clubs unviable because they were small and only showed short films.

Mr. Little GLC then asked about violence in films. Mr. Miller replied that no truly violent films were shown in cinema clubs. Instead merely sexual

violence was contained in Shakespeare's "King Lear" .

Mr. Goodman added that one of the reasons for having a system of licensed cinema clubs was so that they could show controversial films of merit such as "Empire of the Senses" which the British Board of Film Censors considered unsuitable for showing in public cinemas. He added that if the GLC started concerning itself with the political content of films shown in cinema clubs, then the ^{clubs} would take fright and confine themselves to showing banal sex films with no intellectual content.

The leader of the Women's Rights Monitoring Group (a member of the GLC staff) then complained about the showing of sexist films in cinema clubs which were degrading to women such as "Deep Throat". Mr. Miller pointed out that this example was a pure sex film and that if sexual activity was degrading, then the male participants were just as degraded as the female. He pointed out that people who appeared in such films did so absolutely voluntarily. Mr. Goodman added that feminist opposition to this type of film was based on the false premise that only males enjoyed sex.

... She then asked about the question of advertisements for films which were degrading to women. She pointed out that new restrictions on the display of such advertisements have been imposed in France by a female Government Minister. Mr. Goodman replied that this matter was dealt with by the Indecent Displays (Control) Act and therefore was regulated by the general law and not by the GLC, who could however, if it so chose, initiate prosecutions under that Act.

Mr. Goodman referred the GLC to Appendix 4 of the Williams Report which dealt with film licensing in other countries, and especially to Page 226 which dealt with the system in France. He pointed out that this system was the most analogous to the new British one since it provided for a special category of cinema to show the type of films which it was intended to confine to cinema clubs in Great Britain. He added that Spain had adopted a system based on the French one. Mr. Miller gave an account of his experience of the French system and how it worked well in practice as the Williams Report stated. Mr. Branigan asked about the risk of older minors gaining access to adults-only cinema clubs, adding that this had happened in public cinemas which were showing adults-only films. Mr. Goodman pointed out that the fact that ^{some} one had to be a member of a cinema club before gaining admittance, and the risk that a cinema club would not have its annual licence renewed if it admitted minors, were sufficient safeguards. Mr. Miller added that in France an effective system of preventing minors from entering adults-only cinemas existed, and therefore it could also exist in this country.

From the Chair Mr. Little GLC thereupon concluded the Meeting and thanked the members of the delegation for their attendance, apologising for the limited time available. He added that if the delegation had any further points, they could make them by letter to the GLC.