

~~CENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

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The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

NO/DAW/DP

4th February 1988

The Editor,
"The Guardian",
119 Farringdon Road,
London,
EC1R 3ER.

Dear Sir,

Catherine Itzin claims ("The Guardian 2nd Feb.) that our Obscene Publications legislation is supposed to cover "pornography". Although the preamble to the 1959 Act does indeed state that it is "to strengthen the law concerning pornography", the word itself occurs nowhere in that Act and nowhere else in British law. Before Ms. Itzin makes any further attempts to justify her wild claims and demands for even more draconian censorship measures, she would do well to define, in precise, legal terms, just what she means by "pornography". It is simply not good enough to maintain that "the people who make it, sell it and buy it know exactly what it is". The Oxford English Dictionary's definition is "the description of the life, manners etc. of prostitutes and their patrons". Her definition appears to include virtually anything involving females and their activities of which she disapproves, even when they are being pursued freely and consentingly.

It is interesting that the publication which prompted her article has been unable to find a single publisher throughout the whole of the U.S.A. The editors of the book, published here by "Everywoman", a co-operative feminist magazine, claim that the U.S. constitutional right of "freedom of speech", and which protects "pornography" against their extremist views and has thwarted attempts in the U.S. at ludicrous legislation of the 1983 Minneapolis City Council kind, has been wrongly denied them. Why, then, are they themselves trying so desperately to get this freedom curtailed? Having read the book, I am hardly surprised that no publisher could be found for such insubstantial, un-academic drivel, masquer-

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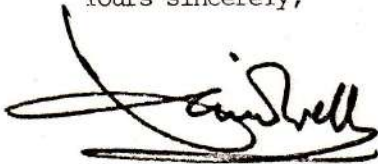
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ading as serious, scientific research and "evidence". (Even the editors themselves are forced to admit that one of the chief 'witnesses' in Minneapolis, psychologist Dr. Ed Donnerstein, has since "changed sides".)

The book also criticises the lack of U.K. police records of connections between "individuals' use of pornography and the commission of crimes of sexual violence". This has already been tried. In 1986 the Home Secretary asked the Association of Chief Police Officers to carry out such a survey, in which all 43 police forces in England and Wales participated. In 20 of those "no instances of this sort had come to light". In the other 23, only 48 offences were identified in which the offender was known to have 'consumed' pornography prior to the commission of the offence, although neither ACPO nor the Home Office could provide details of how such knowledge was ascertained or confirmed. However the Home Office freely acknowledged that "evidence of the consumption of pornography prior to the commission of an offence is not necessarily evidence of a causal link between the two."

It is absurd of Ms. Itzin to believe she can hi-jack the National Council for Civil Liberties and use it to disseminate her own brand of feminist fascism, to promote incitement to sexual hatred and to undermine the long-cherished civil rights of others, when Article 7 of NCCL's Charter is "Freedom of Speech and Publication". So preposterous a challenge was rightly seen-off in the U.S.A. Here, without the safeguard of the written American Constitution, we must be doubly vigilant to prevent even more state censorship and the further erosion of our civil liberties, no matter how deceptively virtuous the guise in which such propositions are presented.

Yours sincerely,



David Webb,
Honorary Director,
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts