

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

CONWAY HALL, LONDON

WEDNESDAY, 12TH JUNE, 1991

HONORARY DIRECTOR'S REPORT

On April 29th this year, the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) was 15 years old. It was not a birthday to celebrate. None of the NCROPA's birthdays are! Our aim is not, and never has been, longevity, but quite the reverse. When I first started the NCROPA all 15 years ago, in 1976, the brevity of its existence was all I desired. I was not naive enough, however, to believe the NCROPA would be able to change things overnight, but I did dare to hope that within, say, five years, we could perhaps bring about substantial fundamental changes to our archaic, out-moded, inappropriate and, above all, unjust and unjustifiable censorship laws. It seemed to me that, notwithstanding this country's ingrained resistance to all change coupled with its heavy propensity to sexual hypocrisy, that even the British would no longer be able to resist the 'freedom-of-expression' wind of change which was then blowing so strongly elsewhere in the so-called 'free' Western World. That we are met here tonight, most welcome though you all are and delighted though I am to see you, is, regrettably, a sad indicator of just how badly I underestimated that establishment resistance and how badly I predicted how things would turn out.

Our draconian state censorship is still in place - not just as it was all those 15 years ago - but with even more added during the interim. And whereas nearly all other countries of the 'free' Western World have long since divested themselves of such loathsome, repressive restrictions on their freedom, Britain alone now 'rejoices' in the proud boast of being the most heavily censored country, if not in the Western World, certainly in the whole of the European Community. And, of course, more recently, even most of the former totalitarian regimes of the Eastern Bloc states have now actually overtaken the U.K. by throwing out old-style state censorship - including sexual censorship! Every week one reads stories in the press and sees programmes on television of how these countries are embracing, and indeed have already embraced, this new freedom, whilst we here in Britain, the supposed 'mother-of-the-free!', are still outrageously subjected to the Big-Brother, state-nannyist authoritarianism manifested, not only in the diktats of Thatcher, Major, Baker, Hurd et al, but also of Short, Primarolo, Beith, Paisley, Howarth and company. For there is no-one, it seems, among our parliamentarians, who has the guts to stand up in that House of Commons and publicly declare what we all know so many of them privately admit, that the principle of free expression is paramount, that sex is delightful, and that its explicit depiction in all media is not 'dirty' and 'obscene', but healthy and wholesome! But what if there were someone that bold? What would he or she - face? Oh, sure Mrs. Whitehouse would sling mud at them. Sure Clare Short would dub them 'women-degraders', sure Lord Nugent and Lord Lane would vilify them, but sure, too, would millions of voters admire and applaud them - applaud them for their realism, their honesty, and their courage. It's been said by many an M.P.

words to the effect that 'I'm not going to the wall for a few "dirty" magazines'. They always automatically assume that they are going to lose votes by supporting the removal of sex censorship. It never occurs to them that they might just win some! How we convince them that this could well be is really what our campaign is all about. For whether we like it or not, it is they who, at the end of the day (another cliché!) are going to have to vote the changes through we so crave for. We've tried unsuccessfully, for 15 years to convince them. We must not let all that effort go to waste by giving up now. Oh yes, we've certainly put the brake on much more that would undoubtedly have been done to add still further to the mountain of curbs if the NCROPA had not existed, but it in no way takes on board our real demands and can, in no measure, appease us. I simply refuse to believe that the past 15 years have been for nothing. I do hope you will share that view, that you will continue to help us and give one, huge last push to see off the curse of censorship in this country once and for all.

Before I comment on events since we last met, may I here say a few words about the delay in holding this meeting. It is, I know, a year and a half since our last General Meeting. The reason for this is largely myself. Twice before dates gave been fixed by the Committee - one in January and one in April, I think, - for this meeting. Both dates had to be postponed because (a) I was ill over the post-Christmas period, and (b) my 88 year-old housebound mother had to go into hospital for an operation in April. And as I explained in my letter, my own health could be better. It would have been extremely difficult for a members' meeting to be held when I was away and we therefore decided it was better to arrange another date, albeit as late as this.

A look back over the previous year, then - or rather year and a half - is not encouraging! The one major piece of NCROPA-relevant legislation enacted was, of course, the 1990 Broadcasting Act which became effectively operative at the beginning of this year. This huge Act* incorporates, as you will know, the extension of the provisions of the 1959 Obscene Publications Act to broadcasting, as well as the establishment of the Broadcasting Standards Council as a statutory body, albeit so far without any statutory powers except those compulsorily requiring public acknowledgement of any of their admonitions or displeasures. It remains to be seen whether or not the Director of Public Prosecutions will decide to prosecute the Independent Television Commission and/or Channel 4 Television for their transmission in the "Banned Season" of "Sex and the Censors" and "W.R., Mysteries of the Organism", both of which have been referred to him by Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Branch after alleged complaints from members of the public. So if you really want to get right up Superintendent Michael Hames's nose and demonstrate the stupidity of this new piece of Government state censorship machinery, I suggest that every time you and everybody else sees a programme on television which you think is 'obscene', you make a formal complaint to your local Chief Constable. Under the provisions of PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) he is bound to investigate it. It may not end up in the Courts, but so what?! - just think what administrative chaos it would cause!

Incidentally, with regard to my reference to Michael Grade's position regarding the extension of the O.P. Acts to television, in NCROPA IN ACTION (4th May 91), I have no wish to see him or Channel 4 prosecuted simply so I can say "Serves you right, I told you so". In that unpublished letter to "The Guardian" I actually wrote:- (READ) "Since Michael Grade and Channel 4 TV deserve, etc..... toand rouse

it to open rebellion".

There was also - indeed, still is - the notorious Clause 25/^{now Clause 29} of the Criminal Justice Bill, which has caused so much controversy with regard to 'gay' activities and behaviour. Although there has been some limited toning down of the original provisions in the Bill, it remains largely the same. It is now in 'the Lords, I believe, but is unlikely to be further revised there, and is expected to receive the Royal Assent next month. It remains to be seen what effect it will have on the present already, in many respects, unacceptable situation.

No M.P. drawn in a viable place (i.e. the top twenty) in the 1990 ballot for Private Member's Bills opted to take on a pro-censorship Mary Whitehouse type measure, which we can interpret (a) optimistically, inasmuch as this is, hopefully, indicative of a change of heart in M.P.'s thinking, or (b) cynically, inasmuch as they obviously believe that, having already reached virtual censorship saturation point there is no need to introduce superfluous, duplicate legislation. I'll leave you to make up your own mind on that one!

M.P. Dawn Primarolo did, of course, formally introduce her ludicrous - but highly dangerous - Bill, the Location of Pornographic Material Bill, which included provisions for yet another tier of licensed 'sex shop' legislation to that already incorporated in the 1982 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. She wants any shop that sells so-called 'soft-core', or 'girlie' magazines, like "Mayfair", "Penthouse" and "Men Only", to be specially licensed. The implications of just what this would mean, both for the publishers and the consumers, are, of course, obvious. And, of course it would have to apply equally to male, gay-orientated publications, like "Him", "Zipper" and "Gay Times" etc. She claimed quite inconsistently that she didn't want her Bill to affect 'gay' magazines and was naive enough - or rather the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom - yes, Freedom! - who drafted the Bill for her - were naive enough to believe that they could get away with discriminatively legislating away only publications depicting women in a way that they didn't approve of! It will come as no surprise to any NCROPA member to learn that Dawn Primarolo is a misterogynistic feminist and that the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has been as successfully infiltrated by feminist extremists as was (until recently, we hope) the National Council for Civil Liberties. Dawn Primarolo's Bill, introduced under the Ten-Minute-Rule in the Commons, hadn't a hope in hell's chance of getting anywhere. But she and her cronies are constantly peddling it and will no doubt seize upon any opportunity to pursue its passage. We must do all we can to ensure that her passage - sorry, its passage, is blocked (and I'm indebted to the late and great Max Miller for that tasteless and vulgar crack!)

A word now about getting our message across in the media. There seems to be increasing evidence that the BBC - certainly BBC Television - may be operating a positive exclusion of the NCROPA voice and views. Throughout the whole of the 15 years of the NCROPA's life, neither I nor any other official representative of the NCROPA has ever been afforded a single, proper (and balanced!) opportunity to put forward the NCROPA's message. It would take too long here and now to go into the numerous events which lead me now to believe that such a ban is being implemented. Whether this has something to do with the fact that we have been highly critical of many of the BBC programmes transmitted on our subject, and have often deplored the obvious or, frequently, subtle bias towards our opponents' point of view, I don't know. But I do know that, after 15 years of being virtually ignored by BBC Television, I

find it difficult to believe otherwise. I shall be taking up this matter with the BBC's Chairman, Marmaduke Hussey, and with John Birt, the Deputy Director-General and Head of its News and Current Affairs, and whom I do know from way back when he was a producer at London Weekend Television. I'll let you know what happens.

With regard to the Press, the largely pro-establishment, pro-Tory Government national daily newspapers are, in the main, mostly hostile to our cause. As I see it, the tabloids are hostile because they feel obliged to keep up, quite dishonestly, their nauseating pretence of exposing 'this filth, the filth merchants and the filthy perverts who consume it', whilst at the same time hypocritically using 'sex' to sell their papers - the 'double-porn' syndrome; and the more serious broadsheets are hostile because of a combination of typically British establishment hypocrisy and up-market elitism - and in two of them, in my view, a completely disproportionate and inappropriate emphasis on minority, extreme feminist views, namely "The Guardian" and "The Independent". This imbalance is undoubtedly reflected in their letters columns, particularly "The Guardian". There was a time when "The Guardian" would publish most of my letters. Not so now, although I was assured by their female letters editor that there was no special discrimination against us. I wonder? Anyway it is to illustrate this unknown barrier that I mention a number of unpublished letters to newspapers in NCROPA IN ACTION. With all the activities we are engaged in, it is desperately dispiriting to find, after often sitting up into the small hours writing a necessarily immediate response to a 'hot' issue, that it has all been such a waste of precious time.

If we had lots of money we could partly overcome this, if you like, 'censoring' of our voice, by buying lots of large advertisements. But alas, we do not and have to press on doing the best we can. I must just mention here, however, how very grateful the NCROPA is to one of our individual members who so generously donated the £3600 gift in November last. He wishes to remain anonymous and we will, of course, respect his wish, but I know you will wish to join me and the Committee in expressing our sincerest thanks for his beneficent gesture. I must also publicly thank David Sullivan, proprietor of the "Sport" newspapers for his continued generosity and unwavering support over many years, and the Quietlynn and Goldstar publishing companies, who, apart from cash help, are so generous in donating stationery and office supplies. Moreover Quietlynn have agreed to reprint our promotion leaflets, which are now exhausted, free of charge. Many thanks to them and, indeed, to all other supporters and benefactors for their contributions both large and small.

Since it was reported in NCROPA IN ACTION, I will not dwell too much here on my traumatic experience at Heathrow Airport on 14th November last year. I suppose in a way I set myself up for it - but the really disturbing aspect is that my arrest and the subsequent search of my home was prompted solely upon Customs' discovery of my official NCROPA visiting cards, in my pocket diary and which I naturally carry everywhere - old ones, as it happened, like this except with the word 'Organiser' printed where I now have 'Honorary Director'. They saw the emotive words "obscene publications", put two and two together to make 180, and went into overdrive! That anyone should be put into jeopardy simply by exercising their legal and democratic right to campaign for law reform, that they should be subject to this Gestapo-like behaviour in what is supposed to be a 'free' society, is in my view and I'm quite sure yours, nothing short of scandalous. I can assure you, however, that it is going to have not the slightest, intim-

idatory effect on any of my activities in pursuing the aims and ideals of the NCROPA. Whatever the eventual outcome, I am certain I shall be able to count on all our members' solid support. And if any of you are free and able to attend the Uxbridge Magistrates' Court at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 27th June, please do so - preferably wearing a NCROPA badge in support.

But by far the most significant event since we last met, as far as the NCROPA is concerned, was the eventual publication of the Home Office Research and Planning Unit's own report "Pornography: Impacts and Influences"*, carried out by Drs. Guy Cumberbatch and Dennis Howitt. True the remit of the authors was to review all available research evidence on the effects of pornography, but their conclusions are clear as clear, for example (READ) 1. Evidence of the adverse effects etc ... to the end of the para.

sexual crimes may be carried out by etc ... to deviant sexual orientation in offenders.

2. Sexual crimes and violent
been an increase in pornography ... etc ... from available information.

3. Concerns that there has
4. Very little is known about
the possible inhibiting effects ... etc ... to the end of the para.

and so on, and so on.

In essence they conclude that pornography is basically harmless, that it is not responsible for sexual crime and that exposure to it, even in later childhood and adolescence, is not harmful.

In 1979 the Williams Report, the findings of another of the Home Office's own research investigations, the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship, stated (Chapter 13, para 4 "We propose that:..... "Only a small class of material should be forbidden to those who want it, because an objective assessment of likely harm does not support a wider prohibition."

And way back in 1978, Mr. Chairman, in Chapter VIII of the NCROPA's own written evidence to the Williams Committee, surprise, surprise, we said "Censorship ... can only be justified in exceptional circumstances, for example in the interests of national security or where there is indisputable evidence that positive harm will be caused if it is not imposed. With regard to so-called "Obscenity" and "Obscene Publications" (or pornography, if you wish - call it what you will), NO SUCH EVIDENCE HAS EVER BEEN PRODUCED. No-one has ever proved that anyone has been harmed by exposure either to sexually or violently explicit material, either of a "normal" (whatever that means!) or deviant nature."

The "continuing debate" is over, Mr. Baker! What we demand now is action on its verdict!

The only conclusion of Cumberbatch and Howitt with which I disagree is that where they state that "In many ways pornography seems to serve as a totem of society's ills". I don't accept at all the premise that "pornography" is an "ill". And their final paragraph states "At the end of the day (I'm glad to see that they use hackneyed clichés, too!) it is difficult to believe that a society can really afford to embrace pornography with welcoming arms since this may serve to legitimise those attitudes which pornography itself may reinforce." This is, in my view an absurd conclusion. It's tantamount to saying society should not embrace freedom of expression with welcoming arms since this may

serve to legitimise attitudes thus freely expressed. What nonsense! However, the great thing is that the main thrust of the report comes down clearly on our side - which is hardly surprising given that the researchers had integrity. (Dr. Cumberbatch was described in "The Times" on 16th January last year as "the country's leading authority on sex, violence and the media.")

And what has been the outcome of all this? Well, when David Mellor, then at the Home Office, originally announced the setting up of the research in January 1990, he said it was to be completed by April. After that date came, I made a number of telephone calls to the Home Office asking when it would be published. Every time I was fobbed off with prevarication and evasion. July was then given as the publication date, but that passed without any site of the report. Articles then began appearing in the press about the delay having been deliberately imposed by the Home Office because its findings were not what they'd hoped. Then in the middle of December, before it had been published, the systematic 'rubbishing' of the report began, and in particular in those two disgraceful identical articles syndicated in the "Daily Mail" and "The Sun" and written by Superintendent Michael Hames, Head of the Obscene Publications squad at Scotland Yard. Copies of the report must have been officially 'advanced' to him beforehand and this must have been with Home Office complicity. On 20th December the report was eventually released officially to the public - on a Thursday afternoon, a day late in the week when considered media comment on it would be difficult if not impossible before the following week - and the following week, and only two working days away, was, of course, Christmas Day!, when the press - and the public - mostly have other things on their minds! By the time the festive season was over, with any luck, the Home Office clearly hoped, it would be largely forgotten. If this wasn't a deliberate Baker ploy, then I'm a Dutchman! And then in addition, to add to this deception, just in case, he added his even more arrogant neo-dismissal of the report's findings in an insulting press release - insulting to Cumberbatch and Howitt, that is. It is perfectly clear that the Government intends to shove this report away on the top shelf, and conveniently forget it. We must not let that happen. We must not let them do another 'Williams'. We must not let them forget that they got it all wrong - yet again! We must embarrass them, and humiliate them ruthlessly and unashamedly!

With this end in view, I am led to my final point. It is this. What the NCROPA most lacks is a high, public profile. Now I know that the very nature of what we are campaigning for often makes a high profile uncomfortable or hazardous. My own experience with Heathrow Customs clearly demonstrates that. It often means that by association we are vulnerable to cheap abuse, denigration and attempted discreditation by a largely hostile media. But we cannot afford to allow ourselves to be intimidated by such concerns. We must be much more prepared to come out into the open, to stand up and be counted, and to put ourselves on the line. With the achievement of this much higher public profile in mind, with the chief aim of attracting as much publicity as possible, we shall be arranging a number of pickets, vigils and demonstrations, to places like the Home Office, the Customs Directorate and to other opposition functions and so on. We must not equivocate. Our banners must fearlessly proclaim our demands "Legalise 'Pornography'", "Decriminalise 'Pornography'", "Sexual Explicitness Delights, Not Harms", and so on. I am prepared to stand in line - indeed I've done it already - and I hope that many of you will do the same. If you are, please sign your name on the list which is circulating so that as and when required, you can easily be contacted.

The Petition to HM Government will simply call for the legalisation of sexually explicit material for consenting adults. Forms for this will be sent to every member shortly and it is essential that every member collects as many signatures as possible. We have not fixed a time limit before the Petition is handed in at No. 10. We've left it open-ended at present to see how it goes. We know some people regard such Petitions as a waste of time, but it will (a) serve to publicise the campaign and (b) serve as a tit-for-tat response to the Petition Mrs. Whitehouse and the NVALA are currently assembling which calls for "pornograhly" to be outlawed.

I must end there and let you have your say, for that is really the main reason for this meeting. But I cannot finish without recording my deepest appreciation for the great work performed by the other members of the Committee for their unflagging, and unwavering support, especially when the chips are down. It is invidious to single out anyone, but I must, once more, pay especial thanks to Ted Goodman, our Chairman tonight, and our Honorary Legal Adviser, for his ever-ready, unswerving commitment to the NCROPA and its ever-growing needs throughout the past 15 years, and for putting up so uncomplainingly with my constant and ever-growing demands - and all quite voluntarily. I don't know many lawyers who would do that!

And really finally, my sincere thanks to yourselves, without whose support, we wouldn't have a campaign at all. Thank you so very much and especially for coming tonight. And always remember, censorship is the real 'obscenity'.