

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS (NCROPA)

MINUTES OF MEMBERS GENERAL MEETING 12TH JUNE 1991

HELD AT THE CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1.

1. Chairman's Welcoming Address Ted Goodman, Committee Member and Honorary Legal Adviser, took the chair and welcomed members. He apologised for the fact that there had not been a Members' meeting since 1989. He said that the reasons for this would be explained by the Honorary Director later in the meeting.

Apologies for absence had been received from two Committee Members, David Kennington and Isabel Koprowski, and also nine other NCROPA members.
2. Minutes of Meeting Held on 4th December 1989 The Minutes of the 1989 Members' Meeting were read and approved after minor amendments requested by Ms. Anne Jansen.
3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting The Director explained that the delay since the last Members' Meeting had been caused by various factors. These included his mother's illness and his heavy involvement in pursuing his legal battle with H.M. Customs & Excise. He re-affirmed, however, that it remained the NCROPA's aim to hold a Members' Meeting every year.
4. Honorary Director's Report David Webb began his report by drawing attention to the fact that, whilst the NCROPA was fifteen years old in April, it was not a birthday to celebrate. The NCROPA's aim was not "longevity", he said, but "brevity". When he founded the campaign in 1976 he would never have thought it possible that fifteen years on we would still need to be in business - and need to be more than ever before! State censorship of sexual material was even more draconian now than it was in 1976. Even though the NCROPA had not yet been able to persuade our Parliamentarians and legislators that they should have the courage and integrity to change our censorship laws, that did not mean that the NCROPA had been totally ineffective and there was no doubt that, because of our efforts, the brake had often been applied to the introduction of even more repressive measures, which would have been added to the already existing mountain of curbs.

He briefly reviewed the past year and a half wherein events did not provide us with much encouragement. He referred, amongst other matters, to the passing of the Broadcasting Act 1990 which had become operative from 1st January 1991 and wherein broadcasting (radio and television) had become subject to the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, and the Broadcasting Standards Council had been made a statutory body, albeit without any real statutory powers.

Reference was also made to the notorious Clause 25 (now Clause 29) of the Criminal Justice Bill (regarding the "promotion" of homosexuality etc.), and to M.P. Dawn Primarolo's ludicrous, although dangerous, 'Location of Pornographic Material Bill', which, almost unbelievably, had been drafted for her by the 'Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom' - yes, "Freedom".

The Director told of his near total exclusion from participation in BBC programmes (re interviews, discussions, current affairs debates, etc.) and of how he was seriously coming to the conclusion that some kind of positive ban had been put on him there. He said that he would be taking up the matter with the BBC Chairman and its Deputy Director General, John Birt, who was Head of News and Current Affairs at the BBC and whom he knew.

The Press were also generally hostile to the NCROPA's cause, he reported, and he was highly critical of the pro-feminist/pro-censorship imbalance in published correspondence and coverage in the more serious broadsheets, and of the Hypo-

critical 'double-porn' values (i.e. filling their newspapers with "porn" in order to boost their sales but at the same time deploring such "filth" and purporting to expose the scandal of it) of the tabloids. He often spent hours writing letters to the press, many of which were not published.

He expressed many grateful thanks to the anonymous benefactor who had so generously donated £3600 to the NCROPA last November, and also to David Sullivan, proprietor of Sport Newspapers for his continued generosity and unwavering support over many years, and to the Quietlynn and Gold star publishing companies; and, of course, to all the NCROPA subscribers.

David Webb referred briefly to his traumatic experience at Heathrow Airport when H.M. Customs & Excise seized six video cassette tapes he had brought back from Holland and which had been given to him by a Dutch national from a Dutch civil rights organisation. The further discovery of some of his NCROPA visiting cards which he carries everywhere, in his pocket diary, had led to a seven-man police and customs officers search of his Chelsea flat and further seizure of some videos and 8mm home movies. He told the meeting that he was challenging the seizures and the civil proceedings would take place at Uxbridge Magistrates Court on 27th June, when he hoped as many NCROPA supporters as possible would attend.

The most significant event of the past year, however, was undoubtedly the publication of the Home Office's Own Research Unit's Report "Pornography: Impacts and Influences", carried out by Dr. Guy Cumberbatch and Dr. Denis Howitt, which had found no evidence to support any proven link between the availability of Sexual material and sex crime. In spite of this conclusive appraisal, Home Secretary Kenneth Baker had still refused to accept its findings and the Report had been almost systematically 'rubbished'.

In conclusion the Director said that what the NCROPA Lacked most was a high, public profile. Although he appreciated all the difficulties of attaining this, it was essential if our cause was to succeed, and we must all be much more prepared to 'come out' into the open, to stand up and be counted, and to put ourselves on the line. He gave details of a proposed NCROPA Petition to H.M. Government for which he urged all to help collect signatures.

Finally David Webb paid a warm tribute to his colleagues on the Committee for their "unflagging and unwavering support, especially when the chips are down" - and especially to Ted Goodman, the NCROPA's Honorary Legal Adviser, who so loyally and uncomplainingly - and completely voluntarily - supported all that we do. His last word was a reminder that censorship was the real 'obscenity'.

5. Reports from Other Committee Members Clifford Hanley (who had travelled from his home in Glasgow for the meeting) talked about his work as an author and journalist.

Eric Miller gave details of his few remaining contacts in Soho and how most 'sex' establishments there had been driven out of business by rigid police enforcement of Britain's anti-porn laws.

Ted Goodman gave an account of how representations he made to Dawn Primarolo MP, concerning her "off the shelf" 'Location of Pornographic Material Bill', had helped cause her to remove its restriction to the depiction of nude parts of only female bodies (The Bill now states that "the female includes the male!") He also outlined his correspondence with the Metropolitan Police about their 'rubbishing' of the Home Office Cumberbatch/Howitt Report.

Tuppy Owens stated that the sex industry in this country was forming a support group with which she was associated through her work as a writer and editor of erotica, like her "Sex Maniacs' Diary".

Ms. Owens read out a message from fellow Committee Member Isabel Koprowski, who was unfortunately unable to attend. It gave an account of her prolific camp-

aigning activities for 'freedom of expression' through participation in University, radio and television debates, in opposing the 'Clare Short factor' and the women's anti-porn lobby.

Alexander Barrie explained that he had only recently joined the Committee and had not, therefore, yet had a full opportunity to take part in active campaigning but was rearing to go!

6. The Honorary Director gave details of the NCROPA's current balances and how he had arranged that no banking charges were incurred and interest was earned. He re-iterated his gratitude for the anonymous donations received which had made possible the holding of the Members' Meeting. (The cost of printing copies of 'NCROPA in Action' for distribution to each member, for example, cost £500.00).

7. Members' Questions

Peter Spiro asked about the organisation's name. The Director explained its reason and history.

Louis Bondy asked about Alf Dubs, with whom he had served on the former Greater London Council. From the Chair, Ted Goodman (who is also a member of the NCCL Executive Committee) gave details of the much-regretted support Alf Dubs was giving to Catherine Itzin and the strident pro-censorship lobby there. The Director recalled how helpful Mr. Dubs had been when in Parliament, but what a disappointment he had been since losing his Battersea seat in the 1987 General Election. He reminded the meeting that Mr. Dubs had accepted a place on the ghastly Broadcasting Standards Council and had thus become part of the state censorship machinery.

Another member asked about the use of decoders to allow viewing of Continental sexually-explicit satellite television programmes (Astra, Filmet and RIC2). The Director explained how the use of such decoders could be made illegal in Britain by virtue of the implementation of the provisions of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, if such programmes were proscribed by the Secretary of State.

8. Open Discussion on Future Strategy and Action Anne Jansen stressed the importance of approaching one's neighbours and telling them of the NCROPA's work for freedom of expression.

From the Chair, Ted Goodman dealt with queries about the effect of the European Community's 1992 programme for the removal of border restrictions. He explained that this would not affect the illegality of bringing "obscene" material into Britain, because prohibition would continue to be enforced in this country after 1992.

9. Any Other Business There being no other business, the Chairman invited those present to repair to the nearby hostelry for appropriate refreshment.

10. Chairman's Closing Remarks Ted Goodman thanked members for their attendance and urged them not to lose heart. He pointed out that Belgium and Hungary had just joined the ranks of the large number of European countries that had legalised "pornography" and that the impending completion of the Channel Tunnel would help combat Britain's insular 'Grundyism' because it would facilitate access to Continental censor-free cinemas and entertainments.