

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Members' General Meeting - 22nd November 1995

Mr. Chairman, Fellow Members,

Since our last General Meeting, a most regrettable two years plus ago, I can only report (1) that much has happened and yet (2) nothing has happened. During that time we've witnessed the Government's and the Establishment's continued war against 'freedom of expression' manifested in still more Government legislation and public posturings about collapsing moral standards and a sea of filth and degradation which is supposedly engulfing us and destroying the very fabric of our society. From the NCROPA's point-of-view the status-quo has barely moved and we appear to be no nearer to achieving our aims than we were way back in 1976 when I founded the campaign - now an almost incredible 20 years ago! It is, I know, a depressing and disheartening thought. All I can say in consolation is, just think how much worse the situation would be without organisations like ours which, if nothing else, so importantly at least put the brakes on what 'they' are trying to do to us, or stop us from doing! As one BBC radio producer once said to me when I was expressing similar sentiments to him (off air, I hasten to add), "Nevertheless, you (~~the~~ NCROPA) must be a real thorn in the Establishment's side". Well I know that we are certainly that and I am also as confident that our tenacity and persistence will eventually pay off. I just hope that our supporters are as similarly optimistic and will not lose heart.

As I partly explained in my letter to the membership with the notice for this meeting, the intervening period has been a very difficult one for me personally for many reasons - health problems, other family and friends' problems, my enforced change of address atec - and this has undoubtedly affected my input into the campaign and its activities, although going through my NCROPA correspondence files for the past 2½ years to prepare for this meeting, it certainly does not appear so.

But the truth is, however, that over this period the political situation has been in such a state of uncertainty that no political party has wanted to become embroiled in up-front involvement in what are mainly perceived by them (wrongly in my view) as controversial social issues of public and private morality which may lose them crucial votes -

especially the two major political parties, Conservative and Labour, 'one desperately trying to survive and recover and stay in power, and the other desperately trying to win the power that eluded it for so long. This is not a ^{Conducive} ~~confident~~ atmosphere in which our 'hobby-horse' although seen desperately important to ourselves, as indeed it is, is seen by the politicians fighting for their lives as ^{nothing} ~~anything~~ but an unnecessary rocking of the boat, and a nuisance. This was more than clearly demonstrated by the recent treatment of MP Clare Short (admittedly no friend to our cause) by Tony Blair when she, I believe very sensibly and reasonably suggested discussion and debate on the legalisation of drugs. It was made abundantly clear that any party involvement in any such contentious issues would not be tolerated when they posed such a perceived possible threat to vote-catching. This attitude from all major parties with regard to the legalisation of sexually-explicit material (pornography), has been oh so apparent during any negotiations, discussions, correspondence I've had too. I've virtually been fobbed off with "Look, you can't expect us to involve ourselves with your concerns in the present climate" One wonders, however, when the climate will be right. This 'brick wall' barrier opposition is at present almost impossible ~~to combat~~ ^{impenetrable}.

My report to you here, will not therefore be prolonged and I will only outline the main issues and events with which the NCROPA has been involved.

In February 1993 the saga of the Red Hot Dutch satellite TV channel unfolded - with its proscription order by Peter Brooke (then Heritage Secretary) and its subsequent High Court challenge which, of course, upheld the Government's banning order, but at least referred the matter to the European Court for judgment as to whether or not it infringed Articles 2 and 22 of the European Union Directive on transfrontier broadcasting activities. I wrote to all heads of Government of the EU and to all 17 EU Commissioners. I had subsequent personal correspondence with Professor Joao de Deus Pinheiro, the Commissioner responsible for cultural and audiovisual affairs, and I attended the High Court hearing with Mark Garner and David Waller, RED Hot Dutch's UK directors. Although Red Hot Dutch has since gone out of business (not surprisingly), the case is still on the list awaiting a hearing date at the European Court. This has been confirmed to me by the Court in Luxembourg. The delay has been because of the inaction and procrastination of the British Government and not on the Court's part. This thus makes doubly

disgraceful and improper - arguably illegal even - the recent proscription of XXXTV (formerly TV Erotica) by present Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley - and her promise to do the same to the French satellite channel Rendezvous Television. I wrote to her about this 18th September, and a reminder on 24th October, having had no reply. I have now written a third time requesting the courtesy of a reply forthwith.

Incidentally in an Independent Television Commission survey only 15% disapproved of 'soft-core' programmes on TV - and only 37% opposed fully explicit films on TV, provided they were screened late at night. (A survey carried out by TV Times had similar results). It is ironic to note therefore, that initially it was the ITC who referred Red Hot Dutch to the Heritage Secretary recommending proscription of the channel under Section 177 of the Broadcasting Act of 1990, and ITC who likewise reported XXXTV for the same treatment.

On 29th April 1993 the NCROPA made an official submission to ICSTIS (the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services) regarding their proposed revised Code of Practice, but on 28th June 1993, their published new Code banned 'adult' advertisements from newspapers and virtually ignored all our pleas for other changes too.

On 9th June 1993 the hearing of my own test case against Uxbridge Magistrates upholding of Customs seizure of 6 videos I had imported from Holland on 14th November 1990, took place in the High Court. As I had done throughout, I conducted my own case and, although Lord Justice Glidewell complimented me for the skill and courtesy with which I had presented it, found against me. I immediately lodged an appeal to the Court of Appeal. The hearing for that was set down to take place on 9th/10th June 1994 but was not reached. It has still not been reached and on 14th November just passed the fifth anniversary of the original incident (at Heathrow Customs) occurred! A hearing date has now been fixed for next year - on 25th/26th January 1996! Because of this disgraceful and totally unacceptable delay I have made formal complaint to the Lord Chancellor. Watch this space.

On 8th July 1993 the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice published its 352 recommendations. The NCROPA had made its own submission to

this Commission and this is acknowledged in their Report.

Also in July 1993 we were invited to submit a Memorandum of written evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee inquiry into "Computer Pornography" (their title, not mine). We did so on October 1993 and copies of this are available for purchase.

The NCROPA's oldest (I think!) but still certainly one of our staunchest allies had his 95th Birthday on 11th August 1993. On behalf of the NCROPA I sent him a birthday greetings card. He is, of course, the amazing Lord Houghton and on 8th October he wrote to me thus:-

READ LORD HOUGHTON'S LETTER

He has since had two more birthdays, I'm happy to say, and I have sent him further greetings cards from us all.

Probably the most damaging event to our cause during all this unhappily long period since we last met here, was the appalling John Major speech to the Blackpool Tory Party Conference on 8th October 1993 in which he promised of a "big crackdown on the loathsome trade in pornography". Although he was undoubtedly playing to that vile gallery of extreme right-wing Conference Tories who annually desport themselves at such functions, it contained and re-emphasised that shameful ~~in~~ in the 1992 Conservative Election Manifesto which boasted of the UK having the toughest anti-pornography laws in Europe and of their commitment to keep them that way. I issued a NCROPA Press Release the following day which I will read to you:-

READ NEWS MEDIA RELEASE dated 8th October 1993

John Major's ominous promise was more than fulfilled with the passage through parliament in 1994 of the infamous Criminal Justice and Public Order ~~XXXX~~ Act, piloted through by the now notorious law-breaking Home Secretary Michael Howard and his equally arrogant and unheeding Minister of State David Maclean. On 10th January 1994 I issued a NCROPA News Media Release about the Bill headed "Obscenity and Pornography Measures an Abomination in an Already Censor-Saturated Society" Because I knew that there was little or no chance of getting a direct response from the Home Secretary or Minister David Maclean, I arranged with my own local MP, ^{Sir}Nicholas Scott, himself a Government Minister

at that time, to take up the matter on my behalf and pass on my correspondence to Maclean. A protracted correspondence exchange then followed but the Minister ^{consistently} refused ~~several times~~ to meet the NCROPA to discuss the Bill because he said that the NCROPA's views were well-known to him and the Government but that they did not agree with them and thus no useful purpose would be served by such a meeting. In other words, any consultation about the Bill, which is the usual practice with highly interested parties like ours, was not to take place with any who opposed it.- Mary Whitehouse et al, yes!, but not the likes of us!

Nevertheless I produced a considered, detailed Critique of Part VII of the Bill, ^{that} which concerned us (on "Obscenity and Pornography and Videos"), which was submitted to each of the 28 members of the House of Commons Standing Committee examining the Bill, as well as other interested parties, like the Shadow Home Secretary, then one Tony Blair, and Sir Ivan Lawrence, chairman of the Home Affairs Comm~~o~~mittee. But and as we all now know to our great concern and regret, most of the concerns we raised were not even discussed either in Committee or in the House proper, or in the Lords. In fact (and I was there) the whole of Part VII of the Bill was dealt with ^{in Committee} and virtually rubber-stamped by Tory and Labour and LIB.Dem alike as it stood, in one morning. It was a deeply depressing experience.

Incidentally when the Bill got to the Lords, I sent a copy of my Critique to our old friend Lord Houghton. Sadly he was in hospital, having had a hip replacement operation. He still wrote back, though, and said he hoped to be back in the House for the Report stage in June. He added in his letter "I must thank you for your wonderful brief. Where could I turn to for a better one!" It's good to know that at least someone appreciates what we are doing, and so eminent a 'someone' ~~as Lord Houghton~~ ^{at that}.

And whilst all this holier-than-thou Tory moralising about law and order was spewing out, the great Tory MP's 'Sleaze' escapades were being exposed almost daily ~~vixx~~. The sickening hypocrisy was mind-boggling.

On 25th March 1994 I sent a two-page letter individually to every member (all 651) of parliament re their atrocious "Criminal Justice

and Public Order Bill - Report Stage and Third Reading" - urging them to to vote against Part VII of the Bill and the Alton Amendment (you may remember him introducing this preposterous amendment whereby in effect any film passed by the British Board of Film Classification or State Censors as I prefer to name them) would have to satisfy a 'fit for children' as well as adults' test.) on Report Stage and Third Reading in the House of Commons. Along with this round-Robin MPs letter I also issued a News Media Release which incorporated a copy of the two-page letter to all MPs headed "The NCROPA lambastes Government's Repressive 'Obscenity' Proposals in Criminal Justice Bill and Alton's Absurd Amendment". Although sent to about 60 or 70 national newspapers, all television and radio news outlets, magazines, specialist periodicals, it was largely ignored. I think the only newspaper which covered it was the homosexual publication "Capital Gay", now, alas, no longer published.

On behalf of the NCROPA, on 7th November I wrote a letter of concerned sympathy to ITN's Julia Somerville and her partner Jeremy Dixon, who had been subjected to the most appalling saturation media coverage because Boots photographic processing had referred innocuous 'family-style' photographs of their 7 year old daughter to the police as being 'indecent'. Letters also sent to Sir Christopher Benson, Chairman of Boots, for this is certainly not the first time Boots have done this, and to Michael Howard, Home Secretary urging the law to be amended in the way we had always argued, i.e. at least for the inclusion of a legal definition of 'indecent' Copy also sent to Jack Straw, Shadow Home Secretary. I am awaiting replies from all of them.

The NCROPA has featured in numerous newspapers and magazines over the past two years - ~~"The Independent"~~, "For Women" magazine, "Capital Gay" newspaper, "Phase" magazine and "The Sport" and "Sunday Sport" newspapers" both of which have carried the NCROPA's advertisement free of charge "Legalise Pornography Now", as have the magazines ^{"Fetish Times"} ~~"Risque"~~ and "Desire". ^{and "Caross"} Our grateful thanks to all of them, their publishers and editors. ~~and also to "Caross" and "Fetish Times"~~. I have written several articles for publications including one for "The Freethinker" about the iniquities of Part VII of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act, on 27th February 1994.

During the period under review I have issued six News Media Releases

on behalf of the campaign. They are costly and time-consuming to produce and distribute and their effectiveness often seems doubtful. However they do keep our name and cause in the media's eye, make them aware that we are in business, and often trigger off other initiatives.

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By far the greatest work load is created by numerous requests from scholars and students and undergraduates for information and material about censorship in the UK for their studies and projects, and even more so by requests and referrals to the NCROPA for help and information from people in trouble with the law - both obscene publications law but mostly customs & excise law. Although, as everyone knows, we are unable to take on cases per se, or assist financially, we do give as much assistance as possible, whilst at the same time requesting that they become supporters of the campaign. We are indebted to Ted Goodman especially here for his professional advice, which, in a few instances, although freely given, is sometimes abused. Nevertheless we try to be as altruistic as we can without giving people the impression that we are an easy and cheap touch.

As you will note, the official address for the NCROPA is now a Post Office Box number, and Eric Miller is acting as a telephone enquiry clearing house, for which many thanks, Eric. I no longer wish to use my own home address or telephone number (I've done so for 20 years) which has sometimes become too intrusive. Ted Goodman agreed some months ago to relieve me of the burdensome but very necessary general administration work of the campaign, although I shall continue (hopefully) to pursue the main thrust of our campaigning, especially the parliamentary lobbying myself. Later on in the meeting we shall need to discuss the future path the NCROPA should take, and, in particular, the desperate need for a NCROPA office somewhere fairly accessible. I must stress very forcefully that my present tiny flat is simply far too small and unsuitable for the NCROPA to continue to be housed there. It simply does not function.

* The Chairman has already talked of the death of Committee member *Gene Joubert*.

Isabel Koprowski resigned from the Committee in November 1993 after I told her of the great exception I had taken to her behaviour over a BBC Open Space programme she had made, in which she had interviewed me on film for the programme, but had then not used any of the footage or even given the tiniest mention of the NCROPA ^{in the programme} whilst at the same

* I've also appeared in several TV programmes on behalf of the
WORLDWIDE, and participated through interviews and/or discussion, in
8 radio programmes, both for BBC and Independent Nations.

giving considerable air-time and publicity to the Feminists Against Censorship campaign. She had, in any case, never, in any of the many television, radio and press spots she had been afforded throughout her entire time as a NCROPA Committee Member, ever made one single mention of the NCROPA, the Committee of which she originally asked to be on in the first place.]t was a disgraceful snub to the campaign, in my view, and I was deeply hurt by it.

albeit because she was Planning a Edition of Forum + handbook

Regrettably we have also lost another Committee Member because Alexander Barrie (Sandy Barrie) has now retired, although he still wishes to remain as an individual member. We thank him for all his past loyal service and support but now hope to welcome Dr. Philip Stokes, a university lecturer from Leicester, onto the Committee and who has agreed to serve.

Before I conclude I must also again thank David Sullivan and his organisation for all his continued support, really practical support, like supplying stationery and office sundries - and especially for the donation of a splendid word processor and computer and printer, which, with a bit or a lot, of help and patience from my friends, I very soon hope *to be proficient enough - and intelligent enough* to be able to operate! And Finally once again a huge thank you to all Committee members, but especially to Eric Miller for his oh so valuable work as Membership Secretary, and to Ted Goodman, our Chair for tonight's meeting, and honorary legal adviser, and without both of whom I and the NCROPA would barely be able to continue.

We do undoubtedly need to put much of our house in better order *not that its been in dis' order, exactly* than its been in during the past 18 months but, as with any voluntary organisation, there is a finite limit to what we can do, constrained as we always are by lack of funds and, of course, by the formidable forces ranged against us. There is no doubt the need for a NCROPA is now greater than it ever was. All I hope is that you and all our supporters will agree and agree that we must continue to fight on.