

Britain needs to be set free of our ancient sex laws

by Dr Tuppy Owens

1270 words needs to be 1400

It could only happen with sex. We worked with experts for months drafting a Bill, consulting the whole gamut of workers, enthusiasts, customers and innocent victims of police investigations, to change the current laws so that British people could stop living in fear of prosecution for what we do in our own bedrooms.

We took to the streets with a Sexual Freedom Parade, and delivered our Bill to the Home Secretary, Jack Straw with a covering letter, and waited for a response. After six months, we sent him another copy, just in case the first got lost. Still no reply. Then we read that Alun Michael, Minister of State at the Home Office is planning to look at reforming some of the old sex laws, and I wrote to him to offer some of our expertise explaining that, *"not only do we have the knowledge but we are also accustomed to talking about sexual matters and would have an enabling influence. Embarrassment fosters prudery, which can bring people to the wrong conclusions"*. Getting no reply to this letter, I am currently writing to him to invite him to come and speak at our forthcoming Symposium, to tell us what exactly he has in mind.

Is it fear of sexual matters which prevents MPs from responding to our work? Or perhaps it's just fear of us, picturing us as a bunch of mindless orgiasts. Well, we're not. As well as the other professional ~~lawyers~~ and experts in our Coalition, I am a ~~sex therapist~~ who trained at St George's Hospital, and received an honorary doctorate for "good work" from the Institute of the Advanced Study in Human Sexuality in San Francisco.

At a recent conference at the University of London, "The Regulation of Commercial Sex", Baroness Foukes confessed that some members of a government working party on Prostitution felt they couldn't possibly sit around a table with a prostitute, and if sex workers attended, they would have to leave the room!

I spent all day yesterday with a prostitute, one of my warmest, wisest, sorted, fun-loving and generous friends. There's something very

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spooky about being governed by people who couldn't bear to even meet a large sector of our population. It's downright prejudicial.

Having got all this off my chest, I will now explain what our Sexual Freedom Bill is trying to achieve, and why. Many of the laws we want abolished are laws ~~most~~ ^{of which} people are totally unaware of and may very well break unwittingly, leaving themselves open to discriminatory ~~opinions~~ ^{opinions}, police threats and/or charges. Many of our changes have already been recommended by the Law Commission.

Here's a summary of the changes we propose:

Intimate communication by letter will at last become legal, so that consenting adults will be allowed to write to each other as they wish, and send their sexy letters through the post. Consenting adults will be free to communicate by telephone as they wish (but non-consensual "obscene" communication will still be illegal).

Adults will be allowed to enjoy consensual sado-masochism (the words "consent shall be a defence to this offence" to be added to the laws against unlawful wounding and actual bodily harm), as recommended by the Law Commission.

Homosexuals will live under the same sex laws as heteros and local authority libraries will be allowed to stock books on homosexuality and other local authority departments won't be forced to exclude homosexuality from items on their agenda. Homosexuals will be allowed to have sex involving more than two persons.

Brothels will become legal, so there will be less need for prostitutes to work on the streets. Those who continue to do so, and cause nuisance may still be prosecuted under the laws of "obstruction" and "causing public nuisance".

With less street prostitution, kerb crawling will no longer be a problem. Clients will be protected from persecution by the police and by the press, if the proposed Privacy Bill becomes law (which we support).

The laws against "causing prostitution, living off immoral earnings and controlling prostitutes" will be abolished. Bosses and pimps who insist their staff engage in unsafe sex practices, intimidate them, deny them access to their passports and/or take extortion ~~ate~~ amounts of

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money from their earnings, can still be prosecuted under the laws of assault and extortion. Landlords will no longer be allowed to terminate leases on the grounds of immoral earnings.

The United Kingdom is one of the only countries in the Western world to retain state censorship. In 1993, the then Home Secretary publicly confirmed that Britain has some of the strictest censorship laws in the world. Nearly every other country in the Western world has removed such restrictions, e.g. Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. Our Sexual Freedom Bill recommends that erotic imagery be legal, and there be no censorship of videos, and films. Sex shops will no longer be required to apply for licences (many of which are denied or, when granted, may cost as much as £19,000 per year). Theatres will be allowed to show erotic acts to adults, and licences for striptease will no longer be necessary. People won't get busted for importing books, magazines and videos for personal use.

Consenting adults will be allowed freedom of expression on TV and radio, and programmes about sex won't be banned. This will provide freedom of choice in listening and viewing. Blasphemous libel and blasphemy will no longer be illegal.

Families will no longer be busted for taking photos of their babies. Innocent photos of bare babies and naturist family photos will no longer be unlawful (although obscene photos, publications and videos of children will still be illegal).

Consenting adults will be allowed to enjoy erotic performances and engage in sex at private parties and clubs (as they can in most other countries), and consume alcoholic beverages when copulating commercially, which is currently illegal.

As recommended by the Law Commission Report on Conspiracy and Criminal Law Reform, people will no longer be subjected to arrest under ancient common laws such as Conspiracy to Outrage Public Morals and Obscene Libel.

Our Sexual Freedom Bill has been drafted by lawyers and citizens including sex therapists, agony aunts, Tantrics, anti-censorship and law reform campaigners, art historians, sociologists, sado-masochists, swingers, prostitutes, and gay & bisexual men & women.

alphabetical

We've used the general principle that criminal law should only prohibit behaviour that harms others, following the guidelines of *The Home Office Williams Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (CMND 7772), which concluded that sexual legislation should define who is trying to protect whom, from what, and why.

This official report was rejected by Margaret Thatcher's government in 1979. We had hoped that the Labour Government would have a more liberal outlook, and our entire campaign was timed to approach them when they came to power, remembering the great changes in law last time Labour had a ^{big} majority, when abortion was legalised and homosexual acts over the age of 21 became legal in private.
 → theatre censorship abolished

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There is a mood for sexual freedom in Britain today, but the government is not being receptive. The Sexual Freedom Coalition is determined to create change, and we will work till we drop, or hopefully, we'll still have enough energy in us, to get on with the orgies!

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