



# Feminists Against Censorship

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## Autumn Update 1995

Colin Laskey, one of the men imprisoned for consensual S&M sexual activity in the notorious Spanner Case, died on Sunday, 14 May in hospital following a heart attack. He 52 years old. With Roland Jaggard and Tony Brown, Colin was one of only three of the original Spanner men to carry on fighting the conviction, and they had recently won a substantial victory when the European Court agreed that the case was admissible. Roland and Tony will continue the fight.

**MAD COP DISEASE:** There have been a number of cases of police harassment and madness on the part of the authorities, all related to greater limits on freedom of expression and freedom to associate and make social contacts. It appears that the Crown Prosecution Service has become much more aggressively anti-sex, as well. Some highlights: *Your Choice*, which distributes non-violent sexual media in the UK, has been raided; the victims intend to appeal. | ♀ | The CPS intended to prosecute the publisher of *Cul d'Or*, a one-woman enterprise involving soft-core submissive female fantasy. The prosecution was called off when a magistrate refused a destruction order on the magazine, saying it was not obscene. | ♀ | House of Gord were busted and convicted; Severin's Kiss has been raided repeatedly by police, and Whiplash will be prosecuted for disorderly house. | ♀ | The Graham Ovenden case has been dropped; after numerous artists, critics and gallery owners wrote to the authorities pointing out that he was a serious artist, it was decided that he wasn't a child pornographer after all. Fine for Ovenden, who is a successful photographer with many contacts, but what about other, lesser-known or less experienced artists? Don't get busted if you're not famous! | ♀ | New prison regulations forbid any unsupervised calls on prison phones by inmates convicted of making obscene phone calls (but not other people who are convicted of using the phone for crimes); and forbid *all* prisoners to make contact with the press without one month's prior notice. Since the press is seldom interested in month-old stories, this effectively censors every prisoner with a story.

Even more disturbing is the current attack on sex education and openness: A man was arrested and charged with possession of child pornography for the much-respected sex education

book *Show Me*. This book, produced in the 1970s (St. Martin's Press for the English-language edition), received wide acclaim from educators and feminists alike at the time of its release. The victim, an educator himself, was convicted, and thus was forced to resign his position and cannot resume his career unless his intended appeal is successful. | ♀ | The police questioned a woman who had a copy of a home education magazine, *Taking Children Seriously*, containing a debate on whether there should be an age of consent. Now we can't even talk about it?

And Valerie Riches, a habitual hysteric on paedophilia, has been complaining about sex education for 8-yr-olds.

**Hylton Bill:** A new bill was introduced to make sex with minors in other countries a crime in Britain (that is, if you have sex with a 15-year-old in, say, California, you could be prosecuted here). The bill fell due to the summer recess. The government refused to back it because it was badly drafted and unworkable, but are looking to bring in this kind of legislation in the near future.

*Executions*, a video showing actual killings by the state and its agents worldwide, is on sale in Britain; W.H. Smith's was carrying it, but has now changed it's mind. Tower Records has continued to carry it. We will monitor the situation. (Our issue is that governments are still killing people in the name of the law — that's what the video should be making people talk about, not whether the pictures should be banned.)

Meanwhile, James Ferman of the British Board of Film Classification refused a certificate to *Bare Behind Bars*, a sex farce parody of *Prisoner: Cellblock H*, because he says he is protecting women from being degraded. The distributor had specifically asked FAC for help and one of our respected academics made a statement on his behalf, but to no avail.

## Pleasures Unbound

Coventry Gallery (Glasshouse Studios, 35/42 Charlotte Road, EC2 — nearest tube: Old Street) will have FAC speakers and performers for their Pleasures Unbound events beginning in October:



On Friday, 27 October, Marisa Carr will perform, followed by a discussion led by Cherie Matrix and Amy Lamé; on Wednesday, 1 November, Avedon & Cherie will host a discussion; on Saturday, 4 November, Rosie Gunn will run a workshop (alas, at the usual stiff Exposures-type prices); on Wednesday, 8 November, Lesley Sharrock (& Ian Jackson) will present "A practical guide to erotic writing"; Friday, 10 November, Marisa will present a mini-Smutfest. Call (0171) 379-9094 or FAC for more info.

**MEDIA:** Feminists Against Censorship members Avedon Carol (speaking for FAC), Tuppy Owens (speaking for herself), and Leslie Sharrock (of *Desire* magazine) taped an episode of *Devil's Advocate* with Nadine Strossen, president of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on the hot seat and Candida Royalle piped in from New York. Strossen's excellent book, *Defending Pornography* (already in release in America from Scribner) will be published in Britain soon by Little Brown. The book is highly recommended — get it when you can. We can't say the same, though, about Darcus Howe, the presenter of *Devil's Advocate*, who seemed awfully interested in asking prurient questions of his guest such as, "What kind of pornography do you like?" Editing seemed geared to trivialize the political nature of FAC's objections to censoring pornography, and deleted particularly interesting discussion in the studio about how obscenity laws have historically been used to censor black activist and other political materials.

**NCCL/"LIBERTY":** Our representative on the executive committee, Roz Kaveney, was re-elected, and all of our motions passed. We were able to defeat all but one of the motions we opposed — and that had been watered down a lot by the time it was voted in.

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has been concentrating its efforts on the Internet, the dangers of media concentration, and Rupert Murdoch. There is, however, some indication that their thinking on porn may change. However, we couldn't help but notice their hostile review of the last FAC book in a recent issue of the CPBF newsletter.

*Common Denominator* is now out from the same woman who founded *Quim*. The new magazine is addressed to a mixed audience, rather than just to dykes.

South Africa now has laws banning censorship and discrimination. Albie Sachs of the South African

Constitutional Court contacted FAC asking for advice about the feminist pornography debate to help in defending freedom of speech in the first challenge under the new constitution of obscenity laws in the case of the South African version of *Hustler*.

#### WINTER FILTH:

We're checking out venues in an attempt to arrange a sort of sequel to the successful SmutFest of last year; this time there will be no expensive imports from the States, but we'll try to concentrate on the local situation and give the spotlight to our native artists as well. We're hoping to have it arranged for February at the moment, although the date will depend on a number of variables.

FAC is now working on another book, this time to be personal essays by anti-censorship women, discussing their own relationship with and attitude to pornography. We have a cover by Grace Lau and contributions from a wide variety of women, complete with the story of how John Mortimer himself came out of retirement to defend the counter-cultural sex magazine *Libertine*. The book is being edited by Cherie Matrix and will be published by AK Press.

#### THE HARD SELL:

T-Shirts are still available in small and "large" sizes, at £7.50. | ♀ | Badges — "another feminist against censorship" and "FUCK censorship" — are in stock; we now also have new ones with our name and logo. | ♀ | Don't forget, even if you've already bought FAC's most recent book, *Nudes, Prudes and Attitudes* (Avedon Carol, New Clarion Press, 1994), ordering it at your library increases the likelihood that people will have a chance to read the facts about pornography and censorship.

*Don't Forget* The number next to your name on the envelope represents the number of mailings you are paid up for. An (x) means you will receive no more mailings unless we receive (first class) stamps or money from you to cover costs.

If you have e-mail and would like to save us some time and money, you can have this update e-mailed to you rather than snail-mailed, by mailing us at [avedon@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:avedon@cix.compulink.co.uk).