

01-730 9537

15, Sloane Court West,  
Chelsea,  
London, SW3 4TD.

25th February, 1976.

The Rt. Hon. Roy Jenkins, P.C., M.P.,  
Home Secretary,  
House of Commons,  
London, S.W.1.

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

CENSORSHIP & THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

Further to my letter of 27th September last year, I thank you for the reply from your private secretary (dated 15th October 1975) although I found it most unsatisfactory. Mr. Farrington said in his letter that the Government was satisfied that, for the time being at least, "the law is justified in imposing some limits on freedom of expression in this field" and that there was no prospect of immediate legislation. Since then, however, amongst numerous other cases, we have witnessed the "Inside Linda Lovelace" debacle, a most ridiculous and wasteful exercise on the part of the Director of Public Prosecutions who will now, I trust, be instructed to refrain from further, future, fatuous forays of this kind and to concentrate his energies on areas of serious public crime and right away from private morality.

Much more to the point, however, is that the Government now sees to it that individual freedom of choice is, once and for all, permanently safeguarded from those repressive forces that our antiquated and puritanical laws not only uphold, but positively encourage. The only way in which this will be sensibly, realistically and justly achieved, is by the complete repeal of the obscenity laws, save for one or two minor exceptions, in the form now being constantly put forward by the majority of serious-minded people of integrity from all walks of life, from all age groups and all political persuasions.

Your remarks in the House of Commons on 12th February distressed me still further. It may be "an illusion to think that there is one single change in the law that would solve the problem." So what? Make two, three, six, ten, - twenty changes! However many changes it takes. Bad law must go, whatever problems this presents to the lawyers. Perhaps I can help them on their way with a few simple suggestions of my own? The first priority must be the repeal of the Obscene

...../cont'd

Publications Acts of 1959 and 1964, followed by a revised version of the Children & Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Acts of 1955, a possible strengthening, re-appraisal or complete re-drafting of the Vagrancy Acts of 1824 & 1838 (to "protect" the squeamish or narrow-minded from being publicly affronted by material they deemed offensive), an end to "conspiracy to corrupt public morals" trials and several other minor amendments to other relevant Acts as a "tidying-up" operation (e.g. to the Post Office Act of 1953, the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876, the Theatres Act of 1968, possibly the Cinematograph Acts of 1909 and 1952 and the Town Police Clauses Act of 1847). The important thing will be for the legal drafters to ensure that there are no loop-holes in the legislation whereby some puritanical, vindictive police chief could manoeuvre the law in the furtherance of his own individual beliefs, as so often happens at present.

I beg you and your colleagues to think again on this desperately important matter because it most certainly is not going to quietly lie down. I, and many others like me, including Members from both Houses of Parliament, fully intend to see to that. Even now I am setting up an inaugural Committee for a National Campaign for the Repeal of the Obscene Publications Acts and already several prominent people have agreed to serve on such a Committee including members from the House of Commons. We intend, at last, to provide a truly representative, militant platform for the forceful expression of what we are certain are the views of the majority of the British Electorate on this subject - viz. freedom for the individual to choose for him or herself. A lady wrote to "The Times" the other day saying that "the pro-pornography lobby (her description, not mine) does not mind standing up to be counted; (but that) the antis are reluctant to incur the ridicule of Mortimer's Circus". Notwithstanding that ridicule might well be the appropriate weapon with which to attack these pitiful souls, it simply isn't true. It's always been the "antis" who have shouted and stamped the loudest and so publicly displayed their frenzied, minority intolerance. From now on, however, we intend to change all that and, as soon as our campaign is off the ground, it will, at last, be our turn to stand up and be counted. I, for one, will be justly proud to be in that number. I hope that you will be likewise, for what a black day that will be, if we turn our backs on the "civilised society".

Yours sincerely,

David Webb.