

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CENSORSHIP

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The CAC Council

- Ted Goodman - Chair
- Mary Hayward - Secretary
- Dr Nigel G. Meek - Editor
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- Brian Seager

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CHAIR'S REPORT

Ted Goodman

Last year (2009), CAC unsuccessfully opposed the criminalisation of possession of extreme pornography and new restrictions on lap-dancing clubs.

We were, by contrast, instrumental in the successful prevention of the proposed prohibition of advertisements for massage parlours (which was to be linked to the making of payment by males for sex an imprisonable offence).

A letter was sent to the Director of Tate Modern protesting at his voluntary withdrawal of a photo from the exhibition "Spiritual America" in compliance with a mere request by the Metropolitan Police. In addition, CAC corresponded with its Australian sister organisation, EROS, about the proposed "Great Firewall" internet filter down under.

This year (2010) CAC, being non-partisan, kept a low profile during the General Election campaign. Afterwards it wrote to Ed Milliband, contender for the leadership of the Labour Party, condemning his denunciation of lap-dancing clubs. We pointed out that women pay to be allowed to perform in such venues. CAC is now preparing a draft Bill for submission to the new deputy Prime Minister in response to his request for proposals for legal reform.

We have sent a message of condolences to the partner of our veteran supporter, Antony Grey, who died in June. On a happier note, CAC can now congratulate its Editor, Nigel Meek, on being awarded a doctorate in political science.

EDITOR'S REMARKS

Dr Nigel Gervas Meek

If it seems like a long time since the last issue of this Newsletter, then that's because it is: two years to be precise. Our apologies. "Events", as they say. We hope to do better.

The purpose of my own article on pages 2 and 3 is to highlight the difficult attitudinal environment in which civil libertarians now find

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THE BRITISH PUBLIC: "WE LOVE CENSORSHIP!"

Dr Nigel Gervas Meek

Taking a step back

Irrespective of whether one is an all-round minimal statist, a civil libertarian or someone with a particular opposition to censorship, it is good to step back now and then and take stock.

There are real dangers from "confirmation bias": the tendency to favour information that confirms one's preconceptions or hypotheses, independently of whether they are true. It is probable that someone "like us" is more likely than the general population to have like-minded associates or to read like-minded works. This can distort one's impression of how things really are.

Finding the data

So, the question is: What do the British public think about censorship? To try to answer this in a reasonably objective manner, I have used data from the 2008 edition of the well-known *British Social Attitudes* survey which has now been running for many years.

The fieldwork was conducted during June through November 2008 and the target population was all adults aged 18 and over living in private households in Great Britain (excluding the 'crofting counties' north of the Caledonian Canal). In total, there were 4468 respondents although this does not mean that all respondents answered or were asked all questions.

Further details are on the Economic & Social Data Service website at <http://tinyurl.com/37kg8pj>.

Amongst many others, in the survey there was the following item: "*Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards*". This was presented with a standard, five-point response option set: Agree strongly, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Disagree strongly.

It will be noted that the material potentially to be censored is implicitly sexual or violent in nature rather than the sort that excites those concerned about religious and/or racial issues.

A first look at some numbers

The (rounded) responses to this single item will, I fear, depress if not always surprise readers. Of the 3925 respondents to this item, 14% agreed strongly and no less than 47% agreed with the necessity of censorship—a total of 61%.

A further 21% took a middling view.

Only 18% of the British population actively opposed censorship when it was promoted as "upholding moral standards".

Looking a little deeper: Age, sex and religion

I do not have the space to engage in a large-scale multivariate analysis of the data. Nevertheless, there are a few simple items that might be of interest to readers, although in each case they perhaps confirm what one might expect.

In the following analyses, I shall confine myself solely to proportional rather than absolute numbers. As might be expected, it changes with each analysis depending upon how many people were asked and then answered each item in the BSA questionnaire.

First, sex. A cross-tabulation reveals a statistically significant association ($p = <0.001$) between the sex of respondents and their responses to the censorship item. Women are more censorious than are men. Almost two-thirds (66%) of women agreed or agreed strongly with censorship on moral grounds against "only" 54% men. Only 13% of women disagreed or disagreed strongly with censorship against exactly a quarter (25%) of men.

Second, age. Again, a cross-tabulation reveals a statistically significant association ($p = <0.001$) between the age of respondents and their responses to the censorship item. Older people are more censorious than younger people are. To take just the two extreme age ranges, exactly three-quarters (75%) of those aged 65 and over agreed or agreed strongly with censorship against just under half (47%) of those aged 18 to 24 (inclusive). Only 10% of those aged 65 and over disagreed or disagreed strongly with censorship against nearly a quarter (24%) of those aged 18 to 24.

A single dataset such as this does not allow an investigation into whether the association between age and attitudes is more suggestive of a maturational as opposed to a generational process, or a combination of both and/or other influences. Again, I do not have the space here to conduct that sort of longitudinal analysis.

Third, religion. It would be interesting in our "multicultural Britain" to analyse this by religious background with particular reference to more recent arrivals. However, the sheer number of Anglicans, Catholics, non-denominational Christians and also the non-religious swamps the numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and so on.

Instead, I use a more general measure of religiosity.

Yet again, a cross-tabulation reveals a statistically significant association ($p = <0.001$) between the religiosity of respondents and their responses to the censorship item. The religious are more censorious than those who are not. No less than 72% of those who considered themselves to be extremely or very religious agreed or agreed strongly with censorship against 46% of those who described themselves as extremely or very non-religious. A mere 12% of those who considered themselves to be extremely or very religious disagreed or disagreed strongly with censorship against one-third (32%) of those who described themselves as extremely or very non-religious.

Not a pretty picture

And so there you have it. Taking the British general public as a whole, a clear majority (61%) favour censorship when it is presented to them as necessary to uphold moral (who's?) standards. A mere 18% take a more robust view, supporting freedom of speech and expression ... and of course implicitly the right of adults to read or watch or listen to the speech and expression of others.

I offer no solutions. Just the information, perhaps even the wisdom, that those of us who oppose censorship face a long and hard road.



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themselves. I was not always thanked for doing so, but when I acted as a liaison between CAC and allied organisations and the Backlash campaign opposing restrictions on "extreme pornography", I often warned that the proponents of the legislation were pushing at an open door.

Aside from material of a sexual nature, it is clear that the other main battlefield involves material dealing with religious matters. Or, to be more specific and indeed honest, matters that offend the sensibilities of Muslims.

It has been alarming to note the intellectual confusion, relativism and deference on the part of many "liberals" caused by years of adherence

to some of the wilder doctrines of multiculturalism and political correctness. In particular, the notion that white, heterosexual men of Western/Christian origin are everywhere and always "the oppressor". Anyone from outside of these categories too often seems to be given a free pass to intimidate those with whom they disagree, both before and after the fact.

And the latter is important. We tend to imagine censorship as something committed on an ongoing basis by formal governments and their agencies. But it is just as much censorship when individuals are cowed into silence at the thought of the fate that awaits them at the hands of freelance executors of the Will of God.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CENSORSHIP

25 Middleton Close
Fareham, Hampshire
PO14 1QN
United Kingdom

Phone: 01329 284471
Email: chair@dlas.org.uk
Email: secretary@dlas.org.uk
Website: www.dlas.org.uk

About the CAC

The CAC is the successor to the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society that was founded in 1968 to assist writers, artists, and others threatened by censorship, and to campaign for reform of censorship laws.

In 1983 the DLAS was re-launched as the CAC with the object of promoting freedom of expression in all its forms and combating restrictions on that freedom and its exercise.

We believe that the repressive dangers of censorship for adults outweigh any possible benefits, and that what is acceptable for adults to read, see, or hear should be decided by personal judgement and taste, not by the law.

The Guiding Principles of the CAC are:

1. The right to obtain and impart knowledge.
2. Freedom from censorship.
3. Freedom for creative artists to present their perceptions, interpretations, and ideas.
4. Support for victims of censorship without discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, race, politics, or religion.

Further policies guiding the work of the CAC are:

1. Vigilance in defence of the freedoms of information and expression requires continued monitoring of attacks on and restrictions of those freedoms, and of the effects of new technology on the control of information gathering, so that the public may be made aware of any dangers that may ensue.
2. Individual or group privacy should not be used as a weapon in defence of censorship or to restrict free access to information.
3. Reaction to any threat or restriction must be positive and expressed in simple, comprehensible terms.
4. The CAC is and should remain independent of all political parties.
5. Collaboration with individuals and organisations in Britain and elsewhere pursuing similar purposes should be pursued where appropriate.
6. The problem of access to material by children is different from that of access by adults. The principles listed above apply to adults.

Joining the CAC

If you support our work and would like to join the CAC, then please write to us at the address at the top of this page. The minimum annual subscription is £5 or £2.50 for students, senior citizens or the unwaged.