

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CENSORSHIP

August 2006

CAC Newsletter New Series No. 2

The CAC Council

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CHAIR'S REPORT

The CAC continues its defence of freedom of expression by making written representations to the powers that be, in an effort to counteract the increasing threat. The stage has now been reached where people wearing "Bollocks to Blair" t-shirts are being prosecuted under the draconian new *Public Order Act*. The government's "war on terror" outlaws forceful advocacy of any faith, as that contravenes the new *Racial and Religious Hatred Act*. An official warlike siege mentality is stifling dissent.

Meanwhile the British political establishment continues its traditional efforts to control the sexual proclivities of the lower orders. The government intends to introduce legislation this autumn to criminalise viewing of Internet material involving sexual violence and/or bestiality. As drafted this law would

outlaw web access to classical pictures such as *The Rape of Europa*, *The Abduction of Ganymede* and *Leda and the Swan!*

The CAC Council meets quarterly on a weekday evening at Conway Hall, London, to co-ordinate campaigning, especially correspondence. Additional help would be useful. Therefore any paid-up CAC member who would like to serve on the Council is asked to send brief biographical details to the Secretary. Fares and postal expenses are reimbursed, but CAC does not have sufficient funds to pay for time given. Any applicant is invited as an observer to Council meetings. Then, if he or she still wishes to join and is approved by the Council, the applicant is made a member.

Ted Goodman – CAC Chair

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Typical! Having designed our new-look newsletter and looking forward to publishing two or three issues a year, the Royal Mail decides to change its pricing policy. In late August charges will become partly size based so A4 publications like this will be classed as a "Large Letter" irrespective of how light they are. Second class postage will

cost 37p instead of the current 23p, a 61% increase. This will hit hard small and medium sized organisations and publications.

We've managed to get this issue out under the old system, but we will have to look at how we want to do things in the future.

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MARCHING TOWARDS THE GUNFIRE (WITHOUT BEING TOO SURE WHO OUR ALLIES ARE)

Historically it has been true that much of the anti-censorship movement's activities have involved material of a sexual nature. To some extent this is still true. For example, the CAC has been involved in the Backlash campaign (www.backlash-uk.org.uk) formed to combat the Government's plans to criminalise "extreme pornography". (In practise this means S&M material, even where all of the participants are consenting adults.)

This focus on sexual material has been because that's where the battlefield has been. However, it is clear that in the last few years the location of the battlefield has shifted. Now, above all else, it involves issues to do with religion. This was pointedly shown in the recent "cartoon wars" involving the publication in 2005 of images of the founder of Islam, Muhammad, in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Worldwide, people died as a result of this. Back home, we witnessed thousands of Muslims marching through London, many of them calling, with virtual impunity, for the deaths of anyone they deem to have insulted Islam, i.e. their own sensibilities. Earlier, in 2004, a Muslim murdered the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh—no friend of *any* religion—after van Gogh produced the 10-minute film *Submission* which dealt with the repression of women in Islamic society and which was based on a script by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, herself living under death threats.

Although mild by comparison, we have also seen in the UK hardline Christians and Sikhs attempting to get plays stopped which they said were blasphemous.

Now we have the *Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006*. Whatever its alleged or real aims, it means the prospect of individuals being convicted—or cowed into silence by the risk of being convicted—for pointing out that some religious beliefs and practices are indeed hateful and wholly incompatible with liberal, Western society.

Without naming names, what has been particularly disheartening has been the response of many on the so-called "Left". In the name of "multiculturalism" they have been perversely eager to offer implicit or explicit support to those whose views on, say, women and gays would rightly be regarded as wholly unacceptable if uttered by, say, a straight, white male. In fact, on this issue, and in sharp contrast to matters of a sexual nature, it has been from the so-called "Right" where much of the support for the anti-censorship cause has come. (Although I am always suspicious until proven otherwise that calls from certain quarters to allow free criticism about, say, Islam are not merely covert racism.)

So we now have three sorts of censorship regarding religious issues: by law, by death threat and by political correctness.

It is a principle of civilised conduct not to gratuitously insult someone or their beliefs. It often helps in any case to take a deep breath and count to ten before opening one's mouth. This is particularly important since in the long run those whose support is amongst the most important to the anti-censorship movement come from *within* religious groups. That is, the countless number of fair-minded adherents of the worlds many religions and denominations who do *not* share the intolerance and propensity towards threats and actual violence of many of those who most vociferously claim to represent particular religious beliefs. It is a natural human tendency to defend one's own when under attack, and the anti-censorship movement should be careful not to alienate those who ought to be its friends.

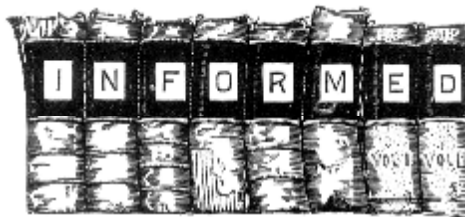
In any event, it is clear that there are many in this country and elsewhere who want to shut down or at least curtail the range of debate on religious issues. The CAC and all others in the anti-censorship movement must stand firm in the face of these varied threats. In the end, you either have free speech or you don't.

Nigel Meek

RECENT AND FUTURE CAC ACTIVITIES

- ◆ The CAC was able to deliver in time to the Home Office its submission to the Consultation on the Possession of Extreme Pornographic Material. Thanks are due to those CAC members who responded to the request in our October 2005 Newsletter for suggestions about the submission. The current situation is unclear. Some of those in the government keenest on any proposed legislation, such as Home Office minister Paul Goggins, have now been reshuffled to other posts. In any event, MediaWatch, the successor to the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, has ruefully had to note that, "We have also learned that the Home Office will not be publishing the responses to the consultation because it is said most of them disagree with the Government's proposals to make the possession of extreme pornographic material a new criminal offence" (<http://www.mediawatchuk.org/newsbriefs/Summer2006.htm>).
- ◆ In the meantime, CAC Editor Nigel Meek has been involved in the Backlash campaign, the umbrella group set up to fight these proposals. The Libertarian Alliance has published an essay of his about the campaign and its wider implications: *The Backlash Campaign: Defending S&M is Defending Individual Freedom*. This can be downloaded as a free PDF from the LA website at <http://www.libertarian.co.uk/lapubs/cultn/cultn053.pdf>.
- ◆ Other members of the CAC Council have made their own, individual contributions. For example, Mark Taha continues with his indefatigable letter-writing campaign in the press. For all the importance of blogs, the "dead tree media" remains vitally important as a source of opinion forming. A well-written letter is a remarkably cheap way of getting a message across to a large number of people.
- ◆ Looking ahead, we hope to hold a Members Meeting in the near future. Details will be circulated nearer the time. The meeting will be open only to those members who have renewed their subscriptions in 2005 and/or 2006. It would be much appreciated if any CAC members who have *not* renewed their subscription would do so. Thank you.

CAC Council



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We have three options. We can leave things as they are and carry the increased costs. However, the CAC, whilst "in the black", is not made of money and this is a somewhat expensive choice. Alternatively, we can leave things as they are but fold the newsletter into A5 size making it into what the Royal Mail classes as a "Letter" that can still be posted for 23p. All well and good, but this will look rather tatty. Finally, we can convert the newsletter into an A5 format. I

have already designed a first draft of a template and the Council will have a look at things when the next issue is due out. Time will tell.

In the literature that the Royal Mail has been circulating it assures us that these changes are "for a better mail service". Well, they would say that, wouldn't they!

Nigel Meek - CAC Editor

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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.