

## CHAIR'S REPORT TO CAC MEMBERS 1999

Ted Goodman, Chair of CAC, attended several fringe meetings at the Labour Party 1999 Centennial Conference at Bournemouth, to try and get our message to the relevant government Ministers, after fruitless correspondence with their departments. At the Arts Council Meeting, he managed to personally ask Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, to honour his previous promise to receive a CAC delegation about British proscription of foreign satellite television stations. (No other country in Europe does likewise). In addition Alan Howarth, Minister of State for Culture, was asked to press for authority over cinema films and videos to be transferred to the Department of Culture from the Home Office, because the latter has a negative crime control mentality. The new Director of the Arts Council promised to revive co-operation with CAC so as to combat film and video censorship, as was done in the 1960's when the two organisations successfully pressed for the abolition of theatre censorship.

At the Freedom of Information Meeting, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, promised to consider amendments to his much criticised Bill on the subject, which allows Ministerial discretion in deciding what must be made public. He drew derision from both the platform and audience when he stated that, like the Guardian newspaper, the government needed to protect its sources! After the meeting Red Pepper organised a phone link to Mr Shalagh, the MI5 defector in Paris.

At the Stonewall meeting, Paul Boateng, Minister of State at the Home Office, refused to comment on film and video censorship, except to state that the forthcoming review of sexual offences would abolish the criminalisation of gay acts where more than two persons are present (eg video filming). He would not give a date for that nor the promised repeal of the notorious Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which prohibits promotion of homosexuality.

The main disappointment was the complete lack of interest in censorship by gay groups. In any event it is obvious that CAC needs to recruit supporters in Parliament. The Chair was informed by the Editor of "The House," the parliamentary magazine, that MPs' assistants sort incoming post and select only a small minority of letters for their employers' attention. A CAC advertisement in "The House" was therefore recommended!

E Goodman. October 1999