

SEXUAL FREEDOM COALITION CONFERENCE 15 MAY 2004  
Round House Church Hall, Lower Clapton Road, Hackney.

Tuppy Owens, the Director, introduced the proceedings and stated that they had become an important annual event to generate much needed legal reform.

Ted Goodman of Campaign Against Censorship spoke of R18 films being restricted to the few existing cinema clubs and thus consigned to commercial oblivion in this country. He explained how the distinction between 18 and R18 films was meaningless, as in each case only adults were admitted. It was based on illogical historical accident, because cinema clubs had been free from censorship until the Cinemas Act 1985 introduced the R18 category to cover them. He urged the audience to make representations to Members of Parliament (especially Liberal ones, as they were more sympathetic) and to the British Board of Film Classification, in support of the petition by Tartan Films, whose documentary "The Good Old Naughty Days" (about French 1920's pornographic films) had only been granted an R18 certificate and thus could not be shown in cinemas in this country, unlike elsewhere.

Mike McCann of the newly formed Adult Industry Association detailed efforts to reform the R18 video/DVD rules of supply (restricted to over the counter sales in licensed sex-shops). He stated that three suppliers had recently been convicted and heavily fined for selling through mail order and/or the internet. Restricting supplies to sex shops, however, was not viable as there were only 200 in the whole country, because many Councils would not grant licences. He was lobbying local government organizations.

Paul Taverner of Ofwatch, a new organization promoting adult television programmes, explained how OFCOM had now taken on the regulatory function over television pursuant to the broadcasting Act 2003. It had replaced the old "taste and decency" standard with

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"generally accepted standards" which was being interpreted more liberally. No further proscription orders were being made against foreign porn television supply, but British adult television stations could only broadcast material less strong than R18, but stronger than the 18 category. This was confusing and television producers had asked for details of unacceptable material. In answer they had been told that it included "knicker bacon" (cameracrew technical term for labiae)!

Dean & Matty of "Swing2us", a swingers' organization, described how the Disorderly Houses Act 1751 prevented sexually liberated consenting adults, wishing to engage in group sex, from exercising their freedom of association in Britain by having proper clubs, as they do on the Continent. The threat of criminal proceedings prevented such clubs from obtaining appropriate premises and alcohol licences. Many were reduced to "dogging" (walking the dog) ie congregating at recognized open spaces at certain times, which carried the risk of prosecution for public order offences

John Blandford, a solicitor specializing in prostitution law, stated that the Home Office was considering reform but had pre-empted it by including in the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 an increase of the maximum term of imprisonment for "controlling prostitutes" from three months to seven years and making females liable to prosecution. Meanwhile other restrictive laws remained eg Sexual Offences Act 1956, common law offence of Conspiracy to Corrupt Public Morals (defined in Shaw v DPP 1959), and Street Offences Act 1959. Some police forces, however, were tolerant. It all depended on the relevant Chief Inspector ! The one in Swindon was trying to close every brothel in the town. In Greater London, by contrast, the Metropolitan Police Clubs and Vice Squad only took action against large-scale organizations which imported prostitutes. Small "massage parlours" were left alone.