

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CENSORSHIP

NATIONAL COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.45, Tuesday, 27th May, 2008 at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Present: Ted Goodman (Chair), Nigel Meek, Brian Seager, Basil Stein, Mark Taha, Mary Hayward. (Ted Goodman was delayed, Nigel Meek chaired in his absence.)

1. There were no apologies for absence.
2. The Minutes of the July 2007 meeting were signed as correct.
3. There were no matters arising.
4. Chairman's Report

4.1. The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act received the royal assent on 8th May. The "extreme pornography" clauses come into force in January 2009.

Mr. Meek suggested that Backlash and others were naïve to think that the clauses would be amended or dropped. Mr. Goodman said that they had done their best but faded out when the bill got to the Lords, where something might have been done to amend it. Mrs. Hayward suggested that the clauses were not as wide-ranging as we had feared they might be. Mr. Meek said that Backlash now need to wait for the first prosecutions (if any). Mr. Goodman said that so far as he knows the Britain has not derogated from the European Convention in this case.

4.2 Mr. Goodman wrote on behalf of CAC to the Review Committee on the 30-year rule for the release of government documents, saying that the time limit should be reduced or even scrapped.

5. Secretary's Report

Congratulations to all concerned on the abolition of the common law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel (Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, clause 79). However, Mrs. Hayward did wish to warn that they might be replaced with something so broadly worded that every nasty American cult would be demanding prosecution of its critics.

She also referred to London Underground's decision not to allow the Royal Academy to advertise its Cranach exhibition with a picture of Venus because it might "cause offence". Strange treatment for an image nearly 500 years old!

5.1 Radio Times "taste and decency" survey

Mrs. Hayward had circulated copies of this to all members of Council. Mr. Meek, with his social researcher's hat on, said that the survey was an example of how NOT to do it. Mrs. Hayward agreed that the questions were very badly worded, they had too many unstated premises and the respondents were a self-selecting sample. However, she asked whether CAC as a body should respond to this kind of thing by ticking the boxes and a vote was taken: yes - 1, no - 3, abstained - 2. It was agreed unanimously that CAC should respond by pointing out the flaws in such surveys. Mr. Meek to write in this case.

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5.2 British Board of Film ClassificationBill

This was a Private Member's Bill introduced by Julian Brazier, who came fourth in the private member's bill ballot. He wanted appointments to the BBFC vetted by a Commons committee, changes to the appeals body (including reviews of classification decisions taken or pending at the behest of not less than 50 MPs), and approval by the Commons committee of BBFC guidelines. Mr. Goodman wrote to him and had a long reply. He also wrote to the Liberal spokesman and had a constructive reply, saying that the government was hostile to tampering with the BBFC and whenever the subject comes up the Culture Minister always says it's the BBFC's decision in individual cases, not the government's.

6. Members' Reports

Mr.Meek - nothing under this heading

Mr.Seager - none

Mr. Stein - wished to record very disturbing censorship aspects of the Terrorism Act; people were being arrested and even charged just for researching Al-Qaida or terrorism in general.

Mr.Taha - the SFC would not be holding an annual conference this year

7. Treasurer's Report

7.1 Expenses claims

Mrs.Hayward explained that with more money than usual in the Campaign's bank account she preferred not to carry the cheque book about with her and asked for expenses claims to be submitted in writing.

7.2 Signatories

Mr.Meek agreed to be the third signatory with Mrs. Hayward and Mr.Goodman. Agreed that the Alliance & Leicester account should be closed and the balance and standing orders transferred to HSBC. Agreed that a suitable HSBC savings account should be opened and some (perhaps half?) of the current account balance transferred to that.

7.3 Spending plans

Mrs.Hayward asked for permission to:

i. revise the recruitment leaflet and get a revised version printed. Agreed she should prepare a draft.

ii. buy CAC paid-for directory entries in reputable publications. Possibly.

iii. buy a photocopier. Unfortunately the computer at her house cannot be fitted to a scanner. Agreed.

iv. review CAC's affiliations to other bodies. This item to be included in the agenda for next meeting.

8. Webmaster's Report

Mr.Meek reported that the Campaign's website was getting 700 to 800 hits a month and 40-80 downloads for different items. However the site badly needed an upgrade. Agreed he should start making arrangements for this. He has in mind the same company that did the SIF one. Not over £1,500 to be spent.

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9. General Meeting

Notice of the intention to hold a general meeting and subscription renewal forms to be included in the next newsletter mailing. Mrs.Hayward to draft the meeting notice and send a copy of the previous subs renewal form to Mr.Meek to revise and use again. Timetable:

- i. mailshot
- ii. allow a month for replies to come back
- iii. decide a date when all members of Council will be able to attend (provisionally in September).

10. Other business

It was pointed out that the groups that protested against Jerry Springer - the Opera had not seen it, as a whole it is pro-Christian, not the reverse. Members were reminded of the Sikh woman's play which was withdrawn because of protests outside the theatre and does not seem to have been put on anywhere else.

11. Date of next meeting

First half of July. Mrs.Hayward to ask Council members again for dates that they do not have free.

Agreed meetings should start at 7pm so that Mr.Goodman could be there for the start.