

BEFORE THE ACT

**A CELEBRATION
TO COUNTER THE EFFECTS OF SECTION 28**

Clause 28

Mr. Tony Banks: I will be brief, but I want to say something about the speech made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). I felt that her speech owed more to imagination than to truth. I listened to an interview that the hon. Lady gave on Radio 4's "Today" programme. Mr. Brian Redhead asked her to support her statement that she had a great deal of evidence about schools promoting homosexuality. Mr. Redhead asked her what evidence she had and she claimed that she had not brought her files with her, but she claimed that she had the evidence. When she was pressed even further, she said "I didn't offer to name any schools." I am not surprised that the hon. Lady has received letters from parents who have been alarmed about the position. They have been alarmed by what the hon. Lady said.

Dame Jill Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No. If the hon. Lady will wait a moment, I will give way to her, and that is more than she did to me or to anyone else.

It is not surprising that parents have become alarmed by the kind of scare stories and fantasies that the hon. Lady has propagated in her various interviews and speeches. She has no evidence and she has never been able to produce evidence, other than that which comes from her over-fertile imagination.

Dame Jill Knight: I have repeatedly given a list of local authorities in whose areas this has been going on. It seems odd to me that Opposition Members are apparently

unaware that local authorities run local schools. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name the schools."] I have repeatedly given all the names of the local authorities, and this is local authority policy. I must also say that parents were complaining long before—

9.30 pm

Mr. Banks: Which schools?

Dame Jill Knight: I have named them. The hon. Gentleman must not nit-pick with me. If he does not understand that local authority education runs the schools, he ought to go back and start learning about how these things are done—[*Interruption.*] Let me complete my remarks to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who was good enough to give way. None of this clause would have come into being without ample evidence, some of which I have read out tonight. All the parents complained long before I made that broadcast. A pregnant woman was kicked in the stomach and jolly nearly lost her child long before it.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Lady has not mentioned one school. She is clearly guilty but insane. I rest my case.

Miss Joan Lester (Eccles):

Some Conservative Members, among them the hon. Member for Edgbaston, said that they were not concerned with reverting to the law as it was before and did not want to discriminate or make life difficult for homosexuals—they wanted only to protect children. The hon. Lady, who started all this, offered no evidence that children were in danger. When challenged, she has never been able to bring forward evidence, and none has been produced. If hon. Members are concerned on the basis of no evidence, they should not support the clause.

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Mr. Pike: Will the hon. Lady produce evidence to support her claim? Does she recognise that the clause goes way beyond the protection of children? Will she also accept that, if the protection of children is the main cause for concern, we must give the same protection to children from the threat from heterosexual abuse, which is far more common and a bigger threat to children than the lesbian or gay threat.

Dame Jill Knight: The clause has nothing to do with criminal abuse. The clause attempts to stop what has been happening to children. The hon. Member for Burnley must understand the point that I have already made twice—if parents did not believe that what was happening was wrong, why did they complain, and complain to some Conservative Members who tried to stand up for their rights?

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Where?

Dame Jill Knight: The evidence is clear for anyone who will take the trouble to read the debates in another place and in this place. I am amazed at the deliberate blindness and deafness of Opposition Members.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Dame Jill Knight: I will not give way. I want to get on; I do not wish to make a long speech.

Mr. Fisher: It is extraordinary, after the clause has been so widely debated in the House, in Committee and in the press, that the hon. Gentleman has not read it. It does not mention local education authorities; it is about all local authorities. The hon. Gentleman should have read the clause before he intervened.

Mr. Livingstone:

... of one school. Again and again we have called for the Conservative Member that is teaching homosexuality. No school in a county or city in this country that is doing what they claim is now so widespread that legislation is needed to stop it. I have listened carefully, and I have heard only three examples given to justify the clause. One was an article in the *Evening Standard* and one was an article in *The Daily Telegraph*. Since when did the legislature base legislation on two articles in newspapers? Before introducing detailed legislation affecting the lives of millions, should we not do a little better than to rely on what some journalist has cobbled together, regardless of whether it is accurate?

The only example given to justify the clause is that we should perhaps pay attention to the GLC public...

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HOUSE OF COMMONS OFFICIAL REPORT

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am concerned that it appears that my hon. Friend has not read any of the debates that have previously taken place. For instance, on 11 January the debate in the other place drew attention to the fact that children under two have had access to gay and lesbian books in Lambeth play centres.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is not true.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): That is a lie.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall) *rose*—

Dame Jill Knight: I am not telling lies and I do not believe that it is the practice in this House for one who has intervened to give way again. I am quoting from the House of Lords debate—

Mr. Tony Banks: That does not make it true!

Dame Jill Knight: The person in charge, Mrs. Jill Delaney, playleader of the Windmill gardens play centre said.

"We have been on training courses where members have access to take this kind of literature into the playgroups but nearly everyone refused. Some of the books on display were terrible. I have children in here as young as 2 years old and I don't think they should be seeing pictures of grown men in the nude in different sexual practices."—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 11 January 1988, column 491, c. 1013*].

Mr. Squire: I cannot respond to that specific point because I do not come from Lambeth and I have not seen the literature about which my hon. Friend complains.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn: Does my hon. Friend not know of such literature?

Mr. Squire: I am quite prepared to admit—

Dr. Cunningham *rose*—

Mr. Squire: There is a queue forming. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame Jill Knight) that that charge has been denied.

Mr. Holland: First, I should like to comment on a claim made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) which concerned a Lambeth nursery group. I sought to intervene in her speech to ask for her evidence and I am sorry that she is not in the Chamber at the moment. With a constituency in Lambeth, I share the views of my hon. Friend the member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) who was able to intervene. The hon. Member for Edgbaston said, "When parents complain." I have not had a single parent alleging what the hon. Member for Edgbaston alleged concerning any school in Lambeth. There has not been a single individual complaint from parents on those grounds. I have not had a single letter supporting the clause. I have received many letters and representations opposing the clause.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) for passing across the literature alleged to be from the Terrence Higgins Trust, which was referred to earlier. The hon. Gentleman may agree that it is not evident that that literature was published by the Terrence Higgins Trust. It looks rather as if it was produced by a local group advertising the Healthline service of the Terrence Higgins Trust. The whole thrust of the trust's argument is precisely to combat AIDS. It is widely recognised that unless literature concerning AIDS is sexually explicit it will not reach its target audience and will in no way serve to combat AIDS.

While there is next to no evidence of homosexuality, the

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): My hon. Friend has asked for examples and perhaps I can assist. I have in my hand a leaflet that was handed out to 15-year-olds at a Bristol school. I will not read out the details of that leaflet because I do not think that I should—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Opposition Members may want that, but suffice to say, the leaflet describes and illustrates homosexual activity and underneath that description says: "Go for it! Share the pleasure with a friend."—[HON. MEMBERS: "By whom?"] The Terrence Higgins trust.

Mr. Squire: I can only take at face value what my hon. Friend has said. Of course, it is deplorable and I would be my list of one. From a brief

Dr. Cunningham: I believe that the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) should get his facts right. There is no information on the leaflet that he brandished as to who was responsible for its publication or distribution. I believe that the hon. Gentleman should be more accurate and precise in his allegations regarding such sensitive matters.

Squire: I almost feel that there are two debates about what happens in schools and what legislation is available to prevent it, but will he accept that there is a whole lot more to local government than schools? There is an awful lot more promotion of homosexuality going on by local government outside classrooms.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend may have reservations about what happens in schools and what legislation is available to prevent it, but will he accept that there is a whole lot more to local government than schools? There is an awful lot more promotion of homosexuality going on by local government outside classrooms.

MENTARY ATES

(NSARD)

9 March 1988

Mr. Pike: Having spoken in the debate on 15 December, I regret that, at this stage, Conservative Members have still failed to produce any evidence in support of the clause. The problem with tonight's debate is that we can consider only the Lords amendment amendments that have been tabled.

Mr. Roberts: The only evidence that has been presented by Conservative Members relating to the promotion of homosexuality in schools and its abuse has been quotes from particular newspapers—the *Evening Standard* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Is my hon. Friend aware that in February 1988, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Express* both carried articles about the promotion of homosexuality in schools and its abuse?

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THE ART WORLD PROTESTS

taken from a letter to The Sunday Times, April 3, 1988

Your editorial on clause 28 (March 13) expressed the hope that the clause, now clause 29, "will be proved to be as unworkable as its critics predicted.....that having been put on the statute books, it will now be forgotten".

Though we appreciate the stand taken by you against the clause, we think it must not be forgotten. The House of Commons did confirm it, and anyone who wishes to invoke it may do so if she or he feels that a local council contravenes it. Contravention of the clause is open to interpretation, both arbitrary and subjective. The mere possibility that anyone may now initiate what are in effect procedures of censorship will also result in self-censorship by libraries, museums, galleries, theatres, and so on funded by local councils. In a country without a declaration of human rights, this clause is a real threat to civil liberties.

David Hockney is not alone in perceiving the pernicious implications of the clause. Any person who is concerned about the erosion of civil liberties in this country must agree that this clause constitutes a grave danger, not just to the arts, but to the future of our society.

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This letter followed up on David Hockney's public outrage against censorship in England.

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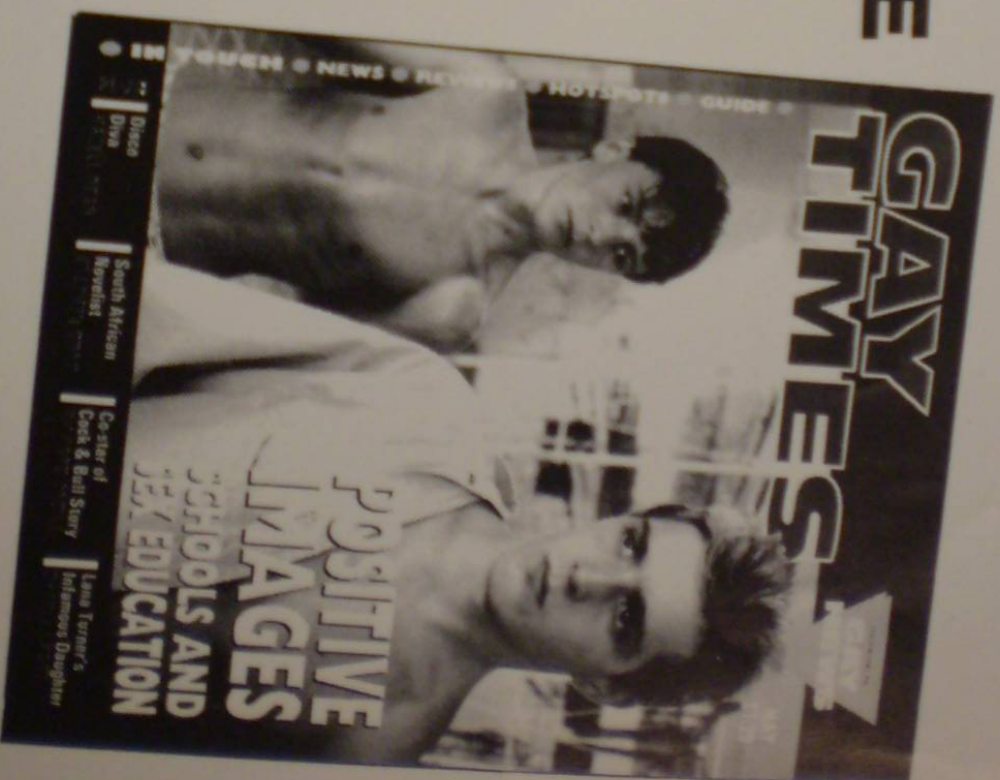
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