

“Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government’s purposes are beneficent . . . the greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal . . .”

—Justice Louis D. Brandeis

# **National Ad Hoc Committee Against Censorship**

The National Ad Hoc Committee Against Censorship is an alliance of national organizations, still in formation, convinced that freedom of thought, inquiry and expression must be defended. They are united in their concern about recent increases in attacks on a wide range of material unequivocally protected by the First Amendment.

Historically, charges of obscenity have been the basis for suppressing unpopular, or new, or misunderstood views — sometimes political, sometimes social, sometimes creative. In 1973 and 1974, the United States Supreme Court, in an attempt to clarify standards for censoring obscenity, handed down a number of decisions which many people—including four of the nine Supreme Court justices—feared would lead to serious attacks on freedom of expression. And the fears are real. For example:

- a small state arts council grant to a scholarly New Hampshire literary magazine was withheld by the Governor because *he* considered a particular poem offensive
- an Illinois community censored Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, a volume of verse epitaphs that has exposed generations of young students to the richness of indigenous American poetry
- in Florissant, Missouri, the mayor announced that he personally would censor all plays produced at a municipally owned theatre. The mayor said his system would be simple: he would bar any play that was made into a movie and had an X or R rating on the *film* version!
- a North Dakota school teacher lost his job and copies of James Dickey's *Deliverance* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* were burned by the school where he assigned them to his high school students

- over 250 bills have been introduced in more than 40 state legislatures in a confused attempt to comply with the Supreme Court standards. At best, most of them are unclear and contradictory

The intimidation created by such incidents is immeasurable. What manuscripts are *not* submitted, art works *not* produced, ideas *not* pursued?

The National Ad Hoc Committee Against Censorship helps its participating organizations to educate their own members—millions of individuals around the country—about the dangers of censorship and how to oppose it. The Committee also provides information to state and local legislatures, and carries out educational work through the mass media.

## Statement of Concern

The steady erosion of First Amendment rights, stemming from the Supreme Court's 1973-74 obscenity holdings, menaces ever more critically the freedom of communication that is the indispensable condition of a healthy democracy. In a pluralistic society it would be impossible for all people at all times to agree on the value of all ideas; and fatal to moral, artistic and intellectual growth if they did.

Some of the undersigned organizations reject all barriers abridging access to any material, however controversial or even abhorrent to some. Others reject barriers for adults, so long as their individual right of choice is not infringed. All of us are united in the conviction that censorship of what we see and hear and read constitutes an unacceptable dictatorship over our minds and a dangerous opening to religious, political, artistic and intellectual repression.

## **Participating Organizations**

American Association of School Administrators

American Association of University Professors

\*American Civil Liberties Union

\*American Jewish Committee

\*American Library Association

\*American Orthopsychiatric Association

\*Associated Councils of the Arts

\*Authors League of America

\*Child Study Association

\*Directors Guild of America

Executive Council of the Episcopal Church

Lutheran Church in America

\*National Council of Churches of Christ

\*National Council of Jewish Women

\*National Council of Teachers of English

\*National Education Association

\*Speech Communication Association

\*The Newspaper Guild

\*Union of American Hebrew Congregations

\*U.S. National Student Association

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Methodist Communications,

United Methodist Church

\*Writers Guild of America, East, Inc.

\*formally endorses Statement of Concern

“In those wretched countries where a man cannot call his tongue his own, he can scarce call anything his own. Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freedom of speech.”

—Benjamin Franklin

## **National Ad Hoc Committee Against Censorship**

22 East 40th Street

New York, New York 10016

(212) 686-7098

50 East Huron Street

Chicago, Illinois 60611

(312) 944-6790