



DRAWING BY HENK PANDER

THE REAL OBSCENITY

by Carl Lyle Jenkins

The Meese Commission's Report on Pornography primly and properly concludes that obscenity is undermining the moral fiber of our society. But obscenity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. And what I find obscene in contemporary American culture is rather different from that which Mr. Meese and his ideological playmates on the Extreme Right find distasteful.

"Sex! Drugs! Rock and Roll!" was the battle cry of the revolution that swept the nation during the '60s and '70s. That revolution was characterized by an open minded enthusiasm for new experiences and novel ideas which offered alternatives to the conventional wisdom about sex, drugs, politics and just about everything else imaginable. Traditional authority was irreverently questioned and, when found wanting and unwilling to change, challenged with protest marches and acts of civil disobedience which shook the upper echelons of American wealth and power. An unpopular, unjust war was halted, an unscrupulous Republican President and his equally corrupt Vice President were both forced to resign in disgrace, and tremendous advances were made in civil, sexual and individual rights. And then, suddenly, the revolution fell flat on its face, lulled into apathy by a few initial victories and then starved into disarray and submission by a faltering economy, high unemployment, and the depression of the early '80s.

The election of ultraconservative Ronald Reagan to the Presidency in 1980 heralded the real end of the revolution. The generous hearted, open minded liberalism that had marked the previous fifty years of American history rapidly gave way to the miserly spiritedness of a Republican Administration with a rigidly authoritarian, rabidly puritanical hostility towards anything that smacked of "permissiveness." The Reagan Administration wasted no time in declaring war on "permissiveness," on sex, drugs, and rock and roll. But though the snake oil peddlers of the religious right were enlisted to bolster this unholy crusade, the War on Permissiveness was declared primarily for economic and not moral reasons. No less an authority than U.S. Surgeon General Koch attacks abortion rights, ERA and the Women's Rights Movement as detriments to the nation's future economic security because not enough babies are being born to man the nation's factories as we enter the twenty-first century. Family planning, birth control, and sex education have likewise been prudently undermined by the Reagan Administration, presumably so that more poor, ignorant, unwed teenagers will do their patriotic duty and produce the babies needed to run the production lines. The Administration's WCTU-style prohibitionist movement against all drugs, including tobacco and alcohol, is likewise an economic phenomenon, spawned by the moral champions of the Far Right to alleviate the decline in worker productivity attributed to the lax attitudes and absenteeism fostered by drug use. And the war against non-procreative sexual activity — as sickeningly epitomized in the Supreme Court's recent decision allowing states to ban oral and anal sex between con-

senting adults — was enjoined because the capitalistic economic system is fueled in part by the sublimation and repression of the sexual drive. America's fearless captains of industry have discovered that well fed, moderately drugged, sexually satisfied hedonists make mediocre workers, and they are doing everything possible to reintroduce Victorian morality and the Puritan Work Ethic to 1980s America.

Now personally, I see nothing shameful or obscene in any act of sexual love between consenting adults. And I have no problem with the production and sale of erotica, of graphic depictions and descriptions of adults giving each other sexual pleasure (kiddie porn and sexual violence are separate issues). No one is forcing Edwin Meese to view sexually explicit material against his will. And the government of a free, pluralistic society has no business dictating the private sexual conduct of consenting adults.

The truth is that the real obscenity in contemporary America is not found in cheesecake magazines or X-rated videos. The real obscenity is found in the Reagan Administration's attacks upon individual liberties, civil rights and sexual freedom, in its Moral McCarthyism and its promotion of censorship, drug tests and loyalty oaths as the legitimate tools of government and private industry. The real obscenity is found in the Reagan Administration's economic policies, in its heartless war on the poor, in its relentless decimation of educational, job training and social programs, and its Robin Hood-in-reverse redistribution of wealth to the wealthy. The real obscenity is found in the Reagan Administration's support for aid to the Contra terrorists which will be used to maim, torture and murder thousands of innocent men, women and