

# Pornography: Obscene profits at women's expense

by Liberation News Service  
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"So we've tried averting our eyes—but where to these days? Billboards, marquees, and massage parlor ads are omnipresent. In the act of buying a paper at my corner news stand, I am surrounded with material contemptuous of my womanhood. My rhetoric may pronounce such material "sexist propaganda"; my nausea rises in simple humiliation. It hurts... Pornography consists no longer [if it ever did] of seedy entrepreneurs slobbering along society's lunatic fringe. It's a major industry...and it's aiming for respectability."

—Robin Morgan,  
New York Times, 3 / 24 / 78

Pornography is a major industry, but is also a very elusive one. Despite its increasing visibility, few people know where it all comes from. There is only a vague sense that it is on

the increase and tremendously profitable. One way to get a handle on the industry as a whole is to break it down into its hard and soft core varieties. Hard core pornography has in the past ten years become a heavily centralized, multimillion dollar enterprise primarily

—Larry Flynt ". . . Why do you think men molest children? Because they're afraid of relating to liberated women."

engaged in producing and distributing hundreds of magazines, newspapers, books, peep shows, and films, with a highly profitable spinoff mail order business dealing in "marital aids." Hard core is explicit; it depicts sexual intercourse in ever possible configuration with

every imaginable partner and species. It also features heavy doses of violence—even torture—which is almost always directed towards women and children.

Ownership of this part of the industry is dominated today by organized crime—businesspeople who invest in illegal enterprises. Finally, hard core pornography is usually sold through the mail or in "generic" establishments. You won't find *Dog Fuck* in your local supermarket.

Soft core pornography is also a multi-million dollar business, and it includes mass market magazines and feature-length films. The magazines, such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Gallery*, are nationally distributed with the likes of *Times* and *Newsweek*; they carry "straight" advertising; and you will find them at your local supermarket, though their covers may be obscured by paper wrapping.

Soft core's contents avoid the legally "obscene" category. Open them up and you'll

find glossy photos of nude women in various spread-leg positions sprinkled in among articles, short stories, and interviews. Soft core doesn't reach the extremes of violence that distinguish its hard core counterparts, but its brand of sexism has particularly high visibility. There are also some soft core gay men's magazines, and *Playgirl* plugs along with its monthly nude centerfold, but these are a decided minority in the field of soft core.

**Growth of Sex Industry**  
*Playboy* gets credit for first bringing soft core pornography to major newsstands in 1953. Its high sales combined with a high cover price soon made it a profitable item for news dealers. By the mid-1960's Hugh Hefner's brainchild had become a number one in magazine retail profitability in the U.S.

The idea was carried on and even by the late 1950's *Playboy* had about 40 imitators. Today there are close to 100 with names like *Swank*,

*Beaver*, *Club Chic*, and *Nugget*, and competition—namely from *Penthouse*—has knocked *Playboy* into second place. Six of the ten most profitable news stand monthlies are now "male entertainment" magazines.

Feature length soft and hard core pornographic films have also increased in number. The Adult Film Association told the *Wall Street Journal* that 100 feature length porno films were shot in the U.S. in 1977, almost twice the number made five years ago. The Association claims that in 1977 weekly box office gross of these films was estimated at \$3.5 million—almost a tenth of the gross of all other movies shown in the U.S.

Hard core materials in the 1950's were often produced by pimps as a side business venture. The market was localized because a nationwide set-up would have taken a lot of capital and organization. But by the time *Playboy* and imitators had become a predictable sight on the newsstands, hard core porn had also begun to grow dramatically. Between 1960 and 1970, for instance, 55 bookstores and 16 theaters opened in New York City.

"Most people, when you talk about porno, still visualize some guy in his garage with an old mimeo machine turning out some nasty drawings," a retired FBI agent who worked the pornography detail for 30 years told D&S. "They just cannot visualize how sophisticated the industry is, how large it is, how much distribution there is."

**Organized Crime Steps In**  
Unearthing information about the hard core industry is very difficult, and the FBI was the only source D&S could find that had followed the industry's development over the years on a national level. The FBI attributes the rapid growth of hard core to organized crime, and though it certainly has an interest in emphasizing "the mob" as a justification for its own importance, much of its information was corroborated.

In the mid-1960's, organized crime first recognized the enormous profit potential of pornography, according to the FBI. It began "investing" in the Times Square bookstore business by offering "protection" (from its own harassment and the police) in exchange for 20% of the bookstores' gross sales. From there they moved into mass production of film footage, books, magazines, and sex aids, and into the development of a national distribution system.

—Women picketing in several cities succeeded in stopping "Snuff", a film which advertised that it included footage of a woman actually being mutilated.

In California, where much of the nation's pornography is produced, the FBI estimates that porn book publishing alone brings in \$5 million. An average hard core bookstore displays hundreds of \$5-10 magazines, and books plus sex paraphernalia such as \$30 life size talking plastic dolls ("Every word you ever wanted a woman to say to you will at last be yours," says the promo, "and the most wonderful thing is she only 'talks' when you tell her to!") Peep shows can gross more than \$10,000 a year and most bookstores have several machines.

The hard core industry has three giants: Parliament News in Los Angeles, headed by Milton Luross, Sovereign News in Cleveland, headed by Reuben Sturman, and Peachtree Enterprises, run by Mike Thevis in Atlanta. Each of the three covers a different part of the country, and together, they essentially control some 400 smaller companies.

"We don't think an independent person could just go into the Combat Zone and open a business," concurred a Boston Vice Squad detective. "Certain groups have certain areas laid out as their territory."

Wherever they are, the hard core manufacturers are ever-creative in dodging investigation. The Broadway Association, a business group that fights pornography in the Times Square theater district reports that "certain names always seem to crop up but they are almost totally inaccessible; you cannot get them on the phone, they do not respond, and they hide behind dummy corporations." These businessmen also make use of elaborate sub-leasing systems that will literally go into 20 sub sub subs.



Bill Hill © 78 LNS  
DOES IT SAY ANYTHING IN THERE ABOUT TENDERNESS, EMPATHY OR WOMEN'S SEXUAL NEEDS!

**Respectability and "the Mainstream"**  
Some people interpret the recent extremes of porn—especially "kiddie porn" and the "Snuff" films that depict the torture and mutilation of women, as part of a backlash against the women's movement. Another theory is that the inclusion of what was once "shocking" material in today's mainstream films, magazines, and TV has simply pushed pornographers to new extremes of exploitation in order to maintain drawing power.

Things are getting more extreme. One researcher at Florida State University who has been analyzing sex pulp novels reports that rape scenes now occur twice as often as they did ten years ago, and the fictional women are enjoying it more. "The subtheme is that the female really does want to be subjugated; no matter how much she says no, go ahead and

brethren. "Playboy's sensuality is joyous and sunlit," says the PR department. "Those who prefer to view life more darkly and through a key hole can fill their needs in other places."

Larry Flynt agrees with this distinction. "I started *Hustler* because *Playboy* and *Penthouse* were copping out. They got afraid to admit they were selling tits'n'ass. Flynt, who makes over \$15 million a year from *Hustler*, *Chic*, *Leasure* Time sex accessories, and his own distributing company, supports the "backlash" theory: "I'm in favor of the women's movement. It's just that they take no responsibility for scaring men...Why do you think men molest children? Because they're afraid of relating to liberated women."

**Challenging the Pornography Trade**  
Flynt gained his own respectability of sorts when, in response to his 1977 conviction in Cincinnati (on charges of conspiracy and pandering obscenity), a self-initiated petition in his support—headed "Larry Flynt: American Dissident"—was signed by 89 writers, editors, and publishers. Very few women signed the petition. As Gloria Steinem commented, "Flynt is not a dissident in our culture. He's a pillar of it."

But many feminists who attack pornography do so while rejecting censorship as a strategy. "Though I share the impulse behind them, I think these appeals for an official crackdown are mistaken and dangerous," writes Ellen Willis in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. "Pornography is a threat to women, but... feminists who support censorship are offering the state a weapon that will inevitably be used against us."

Direct political action is most often favored. Women picketing in several cities succeeded in stopping "Snuff," a film which advertised that it included footage of a woman actually being mutilated. In Manhattan, the west side community of Chelsea picketed to protest the transformation of a favorite local theater into a porn theater.

Woman Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) has sponsored numerous protests including one against a poster depicting a battered woman saying, "I'm Black and Blue From the Rolling Stones and I Love It." WAVAW's tactics include spray painting signs, picketing, and writing protest letters to promoters. They are currently organizing a boycott of Warner Brothers, Electra, and Atlantic record labels which produce album covers showing women being gang-raped, chained and beaten.

Women Against Violence Against Women also considers itself a consumer action group. As Todd Gitlin maintains in an essay on pornography in the film magazine *Cineaste*, "This is the general theme of the society of disposables: sex...is a commodity to be turned in for next year's brand new model."

## All Nicaraguans are Sandinistas

"Our kids are getting ready for more serious combat," explained a mother from one of the poor neighbourhoods of Managua, "and they have our support. We're getting the first-aid ready now. The next time, we will go along with our boys and fight with them."

This mother was speaking for many parents in Nicaragua. Sympathy and support for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), and opposition to the regime of Anastasio Somoza, have become practically universal throughout the country. Today only the Somoza family, the 7,500-man National Guard, and a small remnant of the Liberal Party really back the dictator. "All Nicaraguans are Sandinistas" goes a popular rallying-cry.

The freedom-fighter Sandino, and the first Somoza dictator (grandfather of the present one) both go back over forty years, but it is especially in the last ten months that the conflict has grown to the point where the majority of Nicaraguans support the Sandinista movement. The assassination (probably by the government) of the popular opposition figure, the publisher Chamorro, in January and the spectacular Sandinista takeover of the National Palace in August seemed to encourage the civilian population to participate as never before. In September the country's five key cities, except Managua, were liberated by relatively few Sandinistas helped by large numbers of citizens. Somoza retaliated by bombing the cities.

During the first week of November, four representatives of the Canadian and American churches travelled to Nicaragua to meet with the people and determine how they might contribute more effectively to a just solution to the present conflict. From Canada, Michael Czerny S.J. represented the Inter Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America in the delegation.

This group had extensive talks with a broad spectrum of Nicaraguans. They met with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Managua and Protestant church leaders as well as political leaders from several sectors of the opposition to the Somoza government. In particular they met with representatives of the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) and of the three tendencies of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

As well, the delegation met with representatives of the American government, members of the International mediation team, and representatives of the Nicaraguan business and commerce sector. They visited one of the most heavily damaged cities and

interviewed people who had been present during the struggle and testified to the conflict.

After the visit to Nicaragua, the delegation travelled to Costa Rica and there they met with exiled Nicaraguan groups and with people helping Nicaraguan refugees.

The following is excerpted from the report issued by the delegation upon their return to North America:

The Nicaraguans with whom we

spoke have been drawn together, especially by the events of the past year, into an opposition to General Anastasio Somoza which unites practically all sectors of the population. They see him as a tyrant who is maintained in power by military force alone. They attest that the system he has established and in which members of his family and top leaders of the National Guard participate has reached unprecedented levels of corruption.

The Somoza dasty, set up in power by the United States more than forty years ago, has maintained there by the U.S. ever since, has lost nearly all support among the people. Today, only his family, the National Guard which he commands, and a small remnant of his Liberal Party support Somoza. Church, siness, industry, labor, the people a whole oppose him. Yet he remains in power, the repressive National Guard apparatus remains intact, renewed, even more bloody arm conflict is held to be inevitable and imminent. It is this paradox which captured our attention.

The Nicaraguans we met were unanimous in the feeling that the chief obstacle to peace is Somoza's continuance in power.

It is clear that the National Guard is Somoza's essential power base, and to avoid further conflict, it must be restructured and brought under civilian control.

The removal of Somoza from power and the restructuring of the National Guard are the essential preconditions for progress towards a solution.

The international mediation team composed of the S.A., Guatemala and the Dominican Republic inspires little, if any, coreance among the Nicaraguan people and the organizations which repeat their aspirations. Despite opposition's understanding that aid the U.S. State Department's arrangement that the mediation team should give highest priority to the removal of Somoza and the restructuring of the National Guard, in fact mediation has not addressed these problems energetically.

Popular fear, frustration and unrest are mounting due to the lack of any visible response to peoples expressed demands.

There is massive popular admiration and support for Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). This support cuts across social and economic classes of which have suffered under Somoza's rule, but it comes most strongly from the poor who have borne the brunt of official corruption and vice.

Michael Czerny J., the Canadian representative of the international delegation to Nicaragua and co-author of the report exceed here, will be in Halifax on December 7. Addressing the issue "Nicaragua: Freedom or Death", Czerny will be speaking at St. Mary's University Theatre A of the Burke Education Centre at 8 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend. Copies of the delegation's full report will be available at the time.

## Canadian connection

It is easy enough to centre all attention on American involvement in Nicaragua, but Canadian multi-national corporations haven't been too far behind their American big brothers in looking for cheap labour and sympathetic governments.

The Latin American Working Group has provided the following brief outline of two Canadian companies' involvement in Nicaragua, and supporting the corrupt Somoza regime. Also, there is a look at the Canada-Nicaragua trade balance.

1) **Noranda Mines Limited:** Noranda owns a 60.5% interest in Empresa Minera de El Setentrion, a gold-producing mine in Nicaragua. In 1976, Setentrion's net income was \$1.6 million. (*Financial Post Survey of Mines*, 1978)

El Setentrion employs over 700 workers in conditions that Nicaraguan Congressman E. Molina calls "subhuman—the worst in the country". Top pay is 56c per hour and underground temperatures can reach 115 degrees (F).

Workers complain of silicosis, tuberculosis and dehydration as a result of the poor working conditions. Noranda's local managers say they can't afford to install the pollution control and safety measures needed in the Setentrion mine.

Two years ago, when workers protested the lack of safety measures and demanded higher wages, Noranda's local officials called in the Nicaraguan National Guard who arrested the protest leaders, imprisoned and beat them. (CBC's, *The Fifth Estate*, September 19 / 78)

2) **The Royal Bank of Canada:** The Royal Bank of Canada is the third largest private creditor to Nicaragua's Central Bank. The Royal has lent over \$42.8 million to Nicaragua, according to a report by the country's Central Bank in December 1977, and currently holds about 15% of private bank debt outstanding. Nicaragua's total public foreign debt at the end of 1977 was \$823 million.

The following are the country's major public and private creditors:  
Public Creditors: The World Bank \$ 94 million  
Inter-American Development Bank 84 million  
U.S. A.I.D. 103 million

Private Creditors: The First Chicago Ltd. \$ 89 million  
Banco Exterior de Espana 50 million  
The Royal Bank of Canada 42 million  
(Central America Report, Guatemala, July 17 / 78)

3) **Canada-Nicaragua Trade:** (millions of Canadian dollars)

	Canadian exports	Imports	Balance
1975	3.805	6.061	-2.256
1976	4.683	13.756	-9.073
1977	9.145	14.436	-5.291

4) **Dalhousie's contribution:** Part of Dalhousie's extensive stock portfolio is comprised of investments in the two above mentioned companies. In 1976, Dalhousie's investments in the Royal Bank of Canada had a market value of \$2,057,726. The University's shares in Noranda Mines (the most substantial of its mining stock) were valued at \$313,125.  
\* more recent figures are not available.