Group installs condom vending machines

A GROUP campaigning for greater access to condoms installed a number of condom vending machines in nightclubs throughout the country yesterday to mark St Valentine's Day. Condoms were also distributed free of charge at the Rock Garden, a late night rock venue in Dublin.

Four nightclubs and rock venues in Dublin agreed to participate in the scheme, while seven clubs in Cork and one in Galway also took part. The group, Condom Sense, issued a special "Valentine message" to the new Minister for Health, Dr John O'Connell.

"It takes two to tango, especially on a day like today. We need to work together for realistic change," the message read.

The distribution of condoms through vending machines is not legally permitted at present. Condom Sense welcomed a commitment by the new Minister to change the law.

"We're not saying that condoms should be distributed like smarties, but that they should be easily accessible to people who may need them. Nobody knows better than a GP like Dr O'Connell the extent of the risks facing young sexually active people," the co-ordinator of the group, Ms Rachel Martin, said.

IRISH TIMES. ← 15/2/92.

Cork Examiner, Saturday, February 15, 1992

Condom machine to stay, says publican

THE owner of one of Cork's most popular pubs, last night, insisted he would face prosecution rather than remove a newly installed condom slot machine from his premises, reports *Declan Kelly*.

Kieran Mohally, owner of Georgia Browne's pub in Washington Street was one of 10 pub proprietors in Cork City who agreed to have the illegal condom dispensers installed yesterday, in support of the Condom Sense campaign against laws restricting condom availability.

He told the *Examiner* last night: "The response we have had since installing the two machines has been very positive, and I certainly intend to leave the machines on the premises permanently now.

"I certainly would be prepared to face prosecution on this matter because I believe the issue is important enough for people to make a stand on it.



■ *FIRST CUSTOMER: Kieran Mohally of Georgia Browne's pub, Cork, was first to purchase condoms from the machine installed in his premises as part of the Condom Sense campaign.*

Condom Sense stepped up their campaign yesterday to have the current laws changed, by manning condom stalls in Patrick Street and distributing leaflets to the general public.

They argue that the Government should make condoms more widely available to the public in a bid to combat the onslaught of the AIDS virus and the increase in unwanted pregnancies.

Spokesman, Donal Sheehan, stated that he believed the gardaí did not want to prosecute any of the pubs involved if they could help it.

He explained: "I do not believe that they would want to prosecute the publicans, because the change in the law is imminent, as Dr O'Connell has already intimated.

Meantime, a rift has developed within the ranks of Fianna Fáil's youth wing as to whether it should oppose or support the Condom Sense campaign.

Ógra Fianna Fáil national executive member Rosemary Farrell came out in support of the campaign on Thursday, but she has almost immediately been attacked for her comments by Ógra's Cork North Central organisation, who passed a motion on Thursday night condemning Condom Sense.

In a statement issued yesterday the Cork North Central branch said it wished to distance itself from Ms Farrell's comments, and said her stance deeply concerned them.

The actions of Condom Sense reflected "both an immaturity and poverty of thought" among the campaign activists.

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SUNDAY INDEPENDENT, FEBRUARY 16, 1992

Group defies law on condom sales

MARK SMITH reports on a new campaign challenging Ireland's contraceptive laws

THERE is a scene in the film "Summer of 42" which caused nervous snickers of recognition to escape every 17-year-old who ever saw it. The (male) adolescent hero, egged on by his buddies, enters a drugstore and approaches the severe (female) pharmacist at the counter. "I want .." he says, "I want .. a toothbrush." He is given a toothbrush. "And I'll have a pack of .. razor-blades." The pharmacist proffers same.

This charade goes on until, loaded down with requisites he neither needs nor wants, our hero finally blurts out over his shoulder as he turns to leave: "And gimme some rubbers!"

For a teenager, the ordeal of purchasing a three-pack of Durex Fetherlite falls into the same category as facing a furious father with an appalling school report — it's something you put off for as long as possible. But, in the case of condoms, by the time you've mustered up the courage to flash your cash at a chemist it may be too late.

There is no remedy for unwanted pregnancy, save an operation which under Irish law is illegal. And there is no remedy at all for Aids.

Four out of five adolescent pregnancies in Ireland are unplanned. The number of Aids cases in this country rose by a third last year. But although it's been proved that the use of the humble prophylactic reduces the risk of both by over 90 per cent, it is still far easier for a 17-year-old to buy a bottle of French brandy than a French letter.



Rachel Martin and Clare Watson ... co-ordinating campaign.

Supermarkets, corner-stores, off-licences and pubs all stock cognac (and few ask your age), but the only shop allowed to sell condoms is the chemist's.

Ridiculous, say Aids campaigners. Ludicrous, say pub and club proprietors in Dublin, Cork and Galway. These are the people behind "Condom Sense", which was launched, appropriately enough, on Valentine's Day. And to get their message across, they're prepared to break the law.

"We believe there should be a realistic accessibility to condoms," explains teacher Rachel Martin, one of the campaign's two national co-ordinators. "In an Irish sense, that means accessibility relating to anonymity."

So what's the Condom Sense answer? Ultimately, of course, a change in the law; but until that happens, something far less ambitious — condom dispensers.

On Friday, the proprietors of around twenty pubs and clubs in Dublin, Cork and Galway showed their support for Condom Sense, and risked fines of £500, when they installed gleaming new vending machines in their gents' and ladies' toilets.

"These venues," says Rachel, "are, after all, providing an atmosphere that may encourage sex among young people. They drink a bit on a Saturday night, meet members of the opposite sex .. and you tell me where they'll find a chemist that's open on a Saturday night."

One proud new owner of these illegal machines is Sheila Lynch, whose nightclub, French's, is a haunt of Mulhuddart, Co. Dublin's fashionable twenty-something set. "I gave out questionnaires to 125 of my regular customers, male and female, asking what kind of services they'd like to see added to the club, and 97 of them said condom machines in the toilets."

"We are not," insists joint co-ordinator and social worker Clare Watson, "a bunch of loonies out to break the law for the sake of it. We'd rather not have to. But Ireland's condom law is anti-life, anti-responsibility, and we can't uphold it. These machines will provide a valuable service, and we see their installation as a symbolic action."

The group is calling on the new Minister for Health, Dr. John O'Connell, to make tackling the problem one of his first priorities. But how would they respond to those who believe that by increasing condom availability, you increase promiscuity among young people?

"No-one," replies Clare, "has ever claimed that the increased use of seat-belts has led to an upsurge in the number of car drivers." And Rachel Martin has a farming analogy: "If you compare having sex to driving a tractor, then having Condom Sense is like having a roll-bar on that tractor. Without one, you're risking your life."