

NO/DAW/DP

20th November, 1981.

Robert Edwards, Esq.,  
Editor,  
"Sunday Mirror",  
Holborn Circus,  
London EC1P 1DQ.

Dear Mr. Edwards,

In this week's edition of the "Sunday Mirror" (15th Nov., No. 985), you ran a front page story headlined "Stop This Vile Trade" which concerned some appalling practices involving dogs in the Philippines and was illustrated by a large photograph of a dog with its front legs bound behind its back. This was brought to my attention by one of our Committee members who, in his turn, had had it brought to his attention by some young female employees working in the same office. They are all ardent animal lovers and were so distressed by this picture, that they were literally in tears.

If you know of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, and I hope you do, you will be well aware that we are not normally concerned with censorship, other than that, generally speaking, and at least where adults are concerned, we want it suppressed. The photograph of the tortured dog certainly distressed me too. It is, in fact, what I would describe as a truly "obscene" picture, unlike innocuous pictures sexually explicit in content. It isn't that I am suggesting it should not have been published because it is "obscene" and therefore gives offence, however. I think to believe that no-one has the right not to be offended, as many of our opponents claim. On the contrary, I am delighted that you did publish it so that your readers, hopefully, will be motivated into positive action.

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What I am interested in discovering, however, is your readership reaction and just how many, if any, complaints you receive when you publish such indecent pictures. Do you get more or less, for example, than when you publish a "pin-up" type picture of, say, a naked or near naked girl? Does, for example, Mrs. Whitehouse ever complain about such pictures, or are her complaints always sex orientated?

One final point. The Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981 came into force on 27th October. Have you considered and are you not concerned that, since there is (1) no legal definition of the meaning of "indecent" incorporated in the Act and (2) anyone can bring a private prosecution under the Act without requiring the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, newsvendors and bookshops which sell your newspaper, could well be risking prosecution, particularly since the "indecent" picture of the dog was on the front cover and thus could not possibly avoid being "publicly displayed", according to the terms of the Act, on bookstalls and in shops or on street corners throughout the country?

The implications of what this flaw-ridden Act could bring about are, I believe, very serious and I would very much like to have your comments on the points I have here raised. When the Indecent Displays (Control) Act (which we did not object to in principle, as you will deduce from the leaflet which I am enclosing for your information) was passing through its various stages in Parliament, we tried to point out its pitfalls and that it was, in effect, a censorship measure. Our appeals went unheeded and the obscure legislation we are now subject to, like the Obscene Publications Acts, was enacted. We believe obscure legislation is bad legislation. What about a "Sunday Mirror Crusade" against this?

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,  
Organiser,

National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts.

Enc.

Copy to: Eric Miller