

Sunday Mirror

Mirror Group Newspapers Limited

From the Editor

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Your Ref:- NO/DAW/DP

25 November, 1981

Mr. David Webb,
Organiser,
N.C.R.O.P.A.,
15 Sloane Court West,
Chelsea,
London SW3 4TD.

Dear Mr. Webb,

Thank you for your letter of November 20, 1981 and for the copy of your organisation's explanatory leaflet.

Our front page picture of November 15, as expected, produced an enormous reaction from readers. The vast majority found it distressing but approved of its publication and applauded our "crusade". The remainder thought that it was too distressing and would have preferred not to see it. In comparison, readership reaction to photographs of naked or near naked girls is minimal and on the very rare occasion when we carry such a picture very few readers complain. As regards Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, I cannot remember ever having received a complaint from her.

While I understand how in one sense the picture of the tortured dog could be described as "obscene", it is surely well outside the test of obscenity applied by the Obscene Publications Act 1959 - i.e. likely to "deprave and corrupt".

I agree wholeheartedly with your contention that obscene legislation is bad legislation. If the public cannot clearly identify what it is that Parliament has deemed to be illegal then the law is unsatisfactory. However, on the more general question of whether there is any place for the criminal law in the area of obscene publications and indecent displays there are two points I would raise. The first is that such laws cannot exist unless they have received a majority in Parliament and therefore, in principle, are the will of the people. Secondly, where words such as "obscene" and "indecent" are not defined by statute, one can be confident that sanctions will never be applied unless a jury (or perhaps magistrates), reflecting the contemporary standards of society as a whole, have seen fit to return a verdict of guilty.

I make no excuse for relying on such often-quoted constitutional principles. On this subject, which involves the moral judgment of every individual and about which there is therefore no clear right or wrong, I prefer in my capacity as an Editor to remain in a neutral corner.

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As regards your final point, I have considered the provisions of the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981. It is, I agree, unfortunate that more guidance was not given by Parliament on what is meant by "indecent". I do not, however, see that any injustice is likely to arise from the fact that private prosecutions can be brought under this Act. After all, it is possible to prosecute privately under most branches of the criminal law.

Yours sincerely,


ROBERT EDWARDS