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30th April, 1981.

The Editor,
"The Times",
P.O. Box 7,
200, Gray's Inn Road,
London, WC1X 8EZ.

Dear Sir,

Sir Bernard Braine may consider that sexually explicit material, or "pornography" is immoral and he is perfectly entitled to his opinion. I and millions like me, however, do not. Questions of morality are private matters and should only be the concern of Parliament where known, proven harm will be caused to the public if moral boundaries are not clearly defined by appropriate legislation. Then, and then only, should there be recourse to the criminal law. No such actual harm has ever been satisfactorily demonstrated, let alone proven, where "pornography" is concerned. Indeed, the four major investigations so far undertaken have all found otherwise. They are the Danish Forensic Medicine Council's Report to the Danish Penal Code Council in 1966, the Arts Council of Great Britain's Report on the Workings of the Obscene Publications Acts in 1968, the United States Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in 1970 and the Report of the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship in 1979 (the Williams Report). These distinguished inquiries have all concluded that sexually explicit material is basically harmless and should be freely available to consenting adults.

Although the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts is in favour of certain limited restrictions on the public display of material which some people might find offensive, it, too, hopes that the

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Indecent Displays (Control) Bill, as presently drafted, will fail, but for very different reasons from the ridiculously emotive ones proffered by Sir Bernard. There are two serious flaws in the Bill, as we see it. One is the lack of any legal definition of "indecent", which means that its interpretation is to be entrusted to the Courts. In practice that will almost inevitably mean to the idiosyncratic and subjective judgements of magistrates. The other is that the Bill allows private prosecutions to be brought without the prior consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The omission of such a safeguard will serve as an open invitation to the fanatics of the "Puritan Brigade" to take out summonses willy-nilly against anyone who displays anything of which they personally disapprove. Even the unsuspecting, innocent corner-shop newsagent will be seriously at risk.

What puzzles us most about Sir Bernard's attitude is that he is a member of a political party which publicly condemns censorship, extols the freedom of the individual and which continually campaigns on such a platform with almost fanatical zeal. Either those Tory campaign slogans are a sham or Sir Bernard is guilty of gross hypocrisy, although it must be said that the refusal of the Government to introduce comprehensive, liberalising censorship legislation, as recommended by the Williams Committee, which would afford the people of this country the right to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear, smacks of hypocrisy on both sides.

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,

Organiser,

National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts.

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