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NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

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The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

NO/DAW/DP

21st August 1990

The Editor,
The "Evening Standard",
P.O. Box 2309,
London,
W8 5ST.

Dear Sir,

I did not state in my letter published on 13th August "that pornography has no link with child abuse", as Superintendent Hames claims (Letters 20th August). That was the headline supplied by the "Evening Standard".

What I did say was that "pornography" is not the cause of child abuse. I accept that it may often be an effect, just as the discovery of illicit drugs in a junkie's home is an effect of drug addiction, rather than its cause. The Superintendent has completely missed this point and clearly fails to understand that the sexual attraction to children by those unfortunate adults who are so predisposed is inherently compulsive.

Of course the satisfying of such an appetite by actual sexual activity with children cannot be tolerated, because their coercion would inevitably be involved. A child is not of sufficiently mature mind to be able to make a conscious decision as to whether or not he or she wishes to consent to sexual participation.

That an 'adult' commodity, like "pornography", is sometimes unfortunately misused or abused by a minority, is no reason for it to be proscribed for a largely respon-

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sible majority. Cigarettes are not banned, even though smoking abuse is reputedly responsible for 100,000 deaths a year. Alcohol is not banned, even though drinking abuse kills many thousands more, many drink/drive related deaths. The motor-vehicle itself is not banned, even though more than 5000 people are killed yearly because of car/driving abuse.

In the over-riding interests of living in a supposedly 'free society', acceptable risks have to be taken. Superintendent Hames implication that adult "pornography" is not one of these is ridiculous, as the 1979 Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship unanimously concluded. That is a view which, not only virtually all other Western World countries would endorse (and, indeed, now many from the Eastern Bloc), but to which former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Robert Mark also firmly subscribed. In his 1973 Dimpleby Lecture on BBCTV, Sir Robert said "Our experience with pornography shows that some activities, even if most people think them undesirable or offensive, cannot, in practice, be stopped. The most one can hope for is to regulate the way in which they are carried on."

I do hope that, if Superintendent Hames is really anxious "to conduct a debate about pornography and child sex abuse in as reasonable and balanced a way as possible" (as reported in an interview in "The Times" on August 3rd), he will refrain from adopting the tactics of many of his empire-building, sensation-mongering predecessors, and consider only hard, factual evidence, rather than allow himself and his department to be duped by raw, emotive fanaticism.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Webb', written in a cursive style.

David Webb,
Honorary Director,
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts