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## Indecent Displays (Newspapers)

*HC Deb 12 March 1986 vol 93 cc937-40*

*Ms. Clare Short* ([Birmingham, Ladywood](#)) I beg to move, “That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers.” This is a simple but important measure. I stress that I should like the rule to apply to newspapers and only newspapers. If some men need or want such pictures, they should be free to buy appropriate magazines, but they have no right to foist them on the rest of us. 3.33 pm

It is said that we are free not to buy such newspapers, but things are not as simple as that. I have received several letters from women whose husbands buy such newspapers. Those women object strongly to those newspapers and object to them being left lying round the house for their children to see.

I have also talked to teachers, including my brother. He asks children to bring newspapers to school for use in discussing current affairs or for making papier mâché, and so on. Both he and the children are embarrassed by the children's reaction to the page three pictures.

A precedent for my Bill can be found in the [Indecent Displays \(Control\) Act](#), which provides that public hoardings cannot show such pictures, although they are not illegal when they appear in magazines or when they are seen in private. The same reasoning applies: we should not all be forcibly exposed to them. The argument and precedent are exactly the same.

During the debate on the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), I said that I intended to introduce a Bill such as this. Since then I have received about 150 letters from all over the country. About one third of them are from men — [Interruption.] — the vast majority of whom agree with me. Of course, I received some obscene letters from men; and Mr. Murdoch and those Conservative Members who keep shouting out now should know that such people support and defend page three.

The letters came predominantly from women, particularly young women. They stressed time and again that they did not consider themselves to be prudes but objected very strongly to such pictures. One letter came from a young woman who worked in an office. She was writing on behalf of quite a few young women. They considered themselves to be young and attractive, but every day they were subjected to men reading such newspapers in the office, and to them tittering and laughing and, making rude remarks such as, "Show us your page threes then". Such women feel strongly that this Bill should be enacted. [Laughter]. Conservative Members display their attitudes for everyone to see, and will be judged accordingly.

Many of the letters that I received came from mothers with small children who said that they felt that page three undermined their efforts to instil decent attitudes in their children. Many of them commented time and again on the front-page stories of nasty newspapers such as *The Sun* — [Interruption.] It is the nastiest. Such stories deplore some brutal rape or attack on a child. The reader then turns to page three to see the usual offering.

I agree with the women who think that there is some connection between the rising tide of sexual crime and page three. Obviously, that is unprovable, but the constant mass circulation of such pictures so that they are widely seen by children must influence sexual attitudes and the climate towards sexuality in our society. Those pictures portray women as objects of lust to be sniggered over and grabbed at, and do not portray sex as something that is tender and private.

When future generations read that in our day about 10 million newspapers carried such pictures every day to be left around and seen by children and by lots of women who did not want to see them, they will see those pictures as symbolic of our decadent society. That is why we should take action to make them illegal.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) rose—

3.38 pm

Mr. Speaker Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Adley Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is a prominent supporter of women's rights and her speech was a titillating mixture of politics, prejudice and prurience. It is barely credible that she should come before the House today with such a proposal. Why is she proposing that only pictures of women should be outlawed? Should we not outlaw cheesecake pictures of men? The hon. Lady is clearly proposing to introduce a very sexist measure. Where are we supposed to draw the line?

Writing about her Bill in *The House Magazine*, the hon. Lady refers to “partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers”. The italics are hers, I imagine. It is fascinating to consider who will decide whether a woman is or is not partially naked, and whether her pose is or is not sexually provocative.

The hon. Lady referred to *The Sun* and to Mr. Murdoch. I noticed that she did not refer—it happened by sheer chance, I am sure—to the *Daily Mirror*. To make sure that I did my job properly in opposing the Bill, I had a look at *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* today. I am not sure which of these newspapers would fall foul of the hon. Lady's strictures. Perhaps it is only newspapers owned by Australians, or perhaps by ex-Labour Members of Parliament who are now capitalists.

The hon. Lady does less than justice to her fellow citizens. She would have our newspapers resembling *Pravda*. That would be more in keeping with some of her own political views. Where do we go from here? When the hon. Lady has dealt with the newspapers and expunged from them everything that she finds objectionable, perhaps she and Mr. Livingstone will go round the parks of London doing away with all the statues that she thinks might deprave people. There are few pleasures left to us today. One that I enjoy is sitting in an underground train, watching the faces of the people who are pretending not to be looking at page three of the newspapers. If the hon. Lady has her way, we will be deprived of that pleasure.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) I believe that my hon. Friend should treat this matter seriously, if only because I imagine that neither of us has ever seen the Press Gallery so full.

Mr. Speaker Order. The hon. Member must not interrupt. He knows perfectly well that there can be no interruptions of the debate on a ten-minute Bill, and that, in any case, he must not refer to those who are not in the Chamber.

Mr. Marlow I apologise profusely, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Adley The trouble with the hon. Lady, and those who think like she does, is that she tends to mix only with those who share her views. To suggest seriously, as she does, that these pictures are offensive to the overwhelming majority of women is inaccurate. I suggest that they are offensive to the overwhelming majority of those with whom the hon. Lady is in touch, which is not the same thing at all.

This is a ridiculous proposal. I propose to divide the House so that every Opposition Member can stand up and be counted. I suggest that, of all the measures that have been proposed to the House during this Session, this Bill deserves the booby prize.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):*

*The House divided: Ayes 97, Noes 56.*

Divison No. 98]	[3.43 pm
AYES	
Alton, David	Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Haynes, Frank
Atkinson, N. (Tottenham)	Hogg, N. (C'nauld & Kilsyth)

Barron, Kevin	Holland, Stuart (Vauxhall)
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Home Robertson, John
Beith, A. J.	Howells, Geraint
Biggs-Davison, Sir John	Hoyle, Douglas
Blair, Anthony	Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen N)
Boyes, Roland	Hughes, Simon (Southwark)
Brown, R. (N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)	Kennedy, Charles
Bruce, Malcolm	Kirkwood, Archy
Caborn, Richard	Lamond, James
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Litherland, Robert
Canavan, Dennis	Lloyd, Tony (Stratford)
Clarke, Thomas	Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Clay, Robert	Loyden, Edward
Clelland, David Gordon	McCurley, Mrs Anna
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	McTaggart, Robert
Corbett, Robin	Madden, Max
Cox, Thomas (Tooting)	Marek, Dr John
Craigen, J. M.	Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Maxton, John
Dalyell, Tam	Maynard, Miss Joan
Deakins, Eric	Meadowcroft, Michael
Dubs, Alfred	Michie, William
Duffy, A. E. P.	Mikardo, Ian
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.	Morris, Rt Hon A. (W'shawe)
Eastham, Ken	Nellist, David
Edwards, Bob (W'h'mpt'n SE)	O'Brien, William
Evans, John (St. Helens N)	O'Neill, Martin
Fisher, Mark	Park, George
Foster, Derek	Parry, Robert
Freud, Clement	Pavitt, Laurie
Godman, Dr Norman	Pike, Peter
Gould, Bryan	Porter, Barry
Hamilton, James (M'well N)	Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Rogers, Allan	Thorne, Stan (Preston)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee W)	Thornton, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian	Wallace, James
Short, Ms Clare (Ladywood)	Wareing, Robert
Short, Mrs R.(W'hamp'tn NE)	Weetch, Ken
Skeet, Sir Trevor	Welsh, Michael
Skinner, Dennis	Wigley, Dafydd
Smith, Cyril (Rochdale)	Wilson, Gordon
Spearing, Nigel	Winnick, David
Squire, Robin	Young, David (Bolton SE)
Steel, Rt Hon David	
Stott, Roger	Tellers for the Ayes:
Strang, Gavin	Miss Jo Richardson and
Tapsell, Sir Peter	Mr. Kevin McNamara.
Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)	
NOES	
Adley, Robert	Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
Atkinson, David (B'm'th E)	Jones, Robert (Herts W)
Baker, Nicholas (Dorset N)	Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	King, Roger (B'ham N'field)
Best, Keith	Latham, Michael
Bevan, David Gilroy	Lawrence, Ivan
Body, Sir Richard	Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
Bowden, Gerald (Dulwich)	Lightbown, David
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Lloyd, Ian (Havant)
Brown, M. (Brigg & Cl'thpes)	McCrinkle, Robert
Bruinvels, Peter	MacKay, Andrew (Berkshire)
Buck, Sir Antony	McQuarrie, Albert

Cocks, Rt Hon M. (Bristol S)	Miscampbell, Norman
Coombs, Simon	Mitchell, Austin (G't Grimsby)
Dicks, Terry	Nelson, Anthony
Dover, Den	Nicholls, Patrick
Dykes, Hugh	Norris, Steven
Emery, Sir Peter	Ottaway, Richard
Fairbairn, Nicholas	Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Faulds, Andrew	Shepherd, Colin (Hereford)
Fletcher, Alexander	Silvester, Fred
Forsyth, Michael (Stirling)	Smith, Tim (Beaconsfield)
Fox, Marcus	Stern, Michael
Fry, Peter	Stewart, Andrew (Sherwood)
Gardiner, George (Reigate)	Temple-Morris, Peter
Grylls, Michael	Wiggin, Jerry
Hamilton, Neil (Tatton)	
Harris, David	Tellers for the Noes:
Hayward, Robert	Mrs. Edwina Currie and
Jessel, Toby	Mr. Greg Knight.

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Clare Short, Ms. Jo Richardson, Miss Joan Maynard, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mrs. Anna McCurley, Mrs. Renée Short, Miss Betty Boothroyd, Dame Judith Hart, Mrs. Margaret Beckett and Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody.*

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