



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 January, 1984

The Prime Minister has now seen the Home Secretary's minute of 19 January about the current position on the Video Recordings Bill. She was grateful to be kept informed and will be interested in the outcome of the vote in Standing Committee on the question of the prohibition of the sale of R18 material.

TIMOTHY FLESHER

Nigel Pantling, Esq.,
Home Office

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to Timothy Flesher, located in the bottom right corner of the page.

cc Mr. Allison



Prime Minister:

The Home Secretary will be supporting moves in Standing Committee to prohibit the sale of Restricted (18) videos. Graham Bright is against. I believe the vote takes place on Wednesday

JR 19/11

Prime Minister

VIDEO RECORDINGS BILL

This Bill has reached a crucial stage in Standing Committee and I thought you would like to know where we now stand.

One of the most important issues before the Committee in the next week or so will concern R18 material. This is the category in which the British Board of Film Censors place sexually explicit or violent film material which, in their view, ought to be seen only in restricted club conditions. There is, of course, a very strong body of opinion that such material ought not to be available for viewing on video in the home. When this issue came up on Second Reading, we indicated that we would be glad to abide by the wishes of the House on whether or not the authority designated under the Bill should be allowed to classify such material. We will now need to make our own position on this clear.

My own view, and that of David Mellor, is very strongly that such material is not suitable for sale and that the BBFC ought not to be able to classify it. Whatever may be said in favour of showing material like this in the cinema clubs, I do not think we could possibly defend a situation in which it was available over the counter and therefore liable to be seen by children in the home. I would therefore like David Mellor to take a very strong line on this in Standing Committee. Amendments have been put down which provide a useful platform for discussing the issue in principle and I propose that he should make it clear that it is the Government's firm view that this material should not be classifiable by the BBFC. He would also undertake that, if the vote should go against this proposition (and I gather it will be close, with several of our own supporters, including Graham Bright, likely to vote against) the Government itself will table amendments at Report Stage which would achieve the effect we desire and which would enable the whole House to debate the issue.

/I hope you will

B.R.

I hope you will agree that it is essential, in the interests of obtaining an effective Bill, that we should give this lead. We are already doing everything possible to secure a majority on the Committee for a ban on the classification of R18 material and indeed I intend to make a clear statement on this myself.

I hope also that our position on this issue will ease the fears of those who are worried that the Bill does not go far enough. I know that there is some concern about the role of the British Board of Film Censors under the Bill (and this is a point raised in Mrs Whitehouse's letter of 13 January to David Mellor which was copied to you). We have devised a number of proposals, however, for strengthening the BBFC and for improving its public accountability. I gather these were welcomed by both sides of the Standing Committee when David Mellor described what we had in mind yesterday. I am satisfied that those measures will ensure a Board which is strong and effective and properly responsive to public opinion.

The steps that I am taking on both these fronts should be welcome to all those concerned to bring about effective and rapid controls over the sale of video recordings. This Bill was a Manifesto commitment and we all attach considerable importance to its success. Given the measures I have described, I very much hope that the Bill will attract general support in all its remaining stages, but we will need to maintain the momentum with considerable vigour, on the one hand to gain support for strengthening the Bill in the way I have described, and on the other to persuade those who would like the Bill to go still further than it is, nonetheless, important that they should help to get the Bill into the statute book.

I am copying this minute to Willie Whitelaw, Michael Havers, John Wakeham and Sir Robert Armstrong.

L.B.

19 January 1984