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cc: HO

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

5 July, 1985

Dear Mr. Whitehouse,

Thank you for your letter of 10 May. I am sorry not to have replied earlier, but I wanted to look very carefully into the particular points you raised.

I understand from the Metropolitan Police that no decisions have yet been taken on whether material seized in raids last month should be the subject of prosecutions under section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act or whether applications should instead be made for it to be forfeited under section 3. The raids in previous years which you also mention are at present the subject of judicial reviews. I can assure you, however, that until the Courts reach a final decision, the material which was seized will remain frozen.

I agree with you that the scale of child sexual abuse suggested by the police investigation in Leeds is appalling. The criminal law and the powers of the courts do reflect the gravity of these kinds of offences; indeed, the most serious offences carry a sentence of life imprisonment. And Janet Fookes' Sexual Offences Bill, now before the House of Lords, provides for, among other things, increased penalties in respect of attempted rape and indecent assault against women and girls.

As the TV Eye programme showed, police forces investigate allegations of sexual abuse of children with great care. However, to protect children from coming into contact with known sex

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offenders, Leon Brittan has set in hand a review of the possibility of disclosing relevant criminal convictions to prospective employers or others with a legitimate need to know.

Like you, I am concerned about the entry of pornographic videos into this country from abroad. Customs and Excise do everything possible to prevent such imports, and in the year ending March 1985, they seized 2696 cassettes. Many of these cassettes were master tapes which would otherwise have been used to run off large numbers of copies for supply in this country. This is a considerable success for the Customs.

You rightly raise the problem arising from the production of pornographic material in the United States, and I can assure you that President Reagan shares our deep disquiet about this. He is pressing to see what more successful methods of controlling production could be applied at both local and federal level. A Commission has therefore been set up, and will look at the problem not only from a national view point, but will also take into account the export of US video pornographic films overseas. The Commission is expected to report in June 1986.

As you know, I follow these matters closely and with real concern, and I was therefore very grateful to you for writing in the way you did. In today's world, our young people in particular are subject to so many pressures. But the roots of the problem go deep and, as you say, affect the whole of our Christian way of life. All of us - parents, teachers, community and religious leaders, and of course the Government - have a responsibility. This Government accepts its responsibility, and I believe our actions show it. But we must remain constantly alert.

Yours sincerely  
Ronald Reagan

Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, C.B.E.