

~~CENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

FIGHTING SEXUAL CENSORSHIP

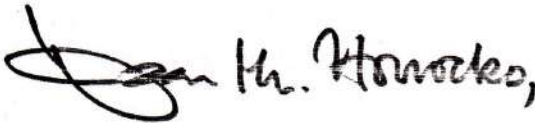
HONORARY DIRECTOR - David Webb, R.A.D.A. Dip., P.O. Box 7744, London, SW3 5YT. 0171-352 9067

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NO/DAW/DP

6th November 1998

Peter Horrocks, Esq.,
Editor,
"Panorama",
BBC Television Centre,
Wood Lane,
London,
W12 7RJ.



Re: "Porn Wars"

It was gratifying, for once, to see a television programme about sexually explicit material and the U.K. (BBC1's "Panorama" 2nd Nov) which was not condemnatory in tone, nor, for the most part, harshly and puritanically judgmental, something that I had strongly expressed to your researcher, Sam Taylor, I hoped would be the case with your "Porn Wars" documentary during his three telephone interviews with me. As far as I am aware, yours was the first such 'establishment' programme that has done this and, on behalf of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA), an organisation I founded and have been running voluntarily for the past 22+ years, I congratulate you.

The NCROPA is less pleased, however, that it was not, itself, allowed an opportunity to voice its own views and aims in the programme, being the largest and oldest anti-censorship campaigning organisation in the UK and the only one campaigning specifically for fundamental changes to the UK's Obscene Publications Acts and the many other statutes and common-law relics which, one way or another, 'censor' what consenting adults can legally see, read and hear, and which saturate this censor-obsessed country.

During the course of the programme you interviewed 22 people (including Home Secretary Jack Straw via written statements, and a gagging, off-screen Customs & Excise 'minder'). A break-down of these (in terms of numbers) shows an apparent balance between what might be described as those 'for' and those 'against' liberalisation of the law. However, closer analysis shows that to be an inaccurate assessment. Of those 'for', five were producers of sexually explicit commercial material (or "pornography" if you will) whom an objective

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COMMITTEE - Alexander Barrie, A.A.Dipl, M.A.I.E.; Dr. Philip Stokes; Ted Goodman, LL.B. (Sol.); Clifford Hanley;
David Kennington, M.A. (Hons.), Litt.D., B.A. (Psy.); Sean Gabb; Tuppy Owens, B.Sc., Dip.H.S.; Dr. Christine Pickard, M.B., Ch.B

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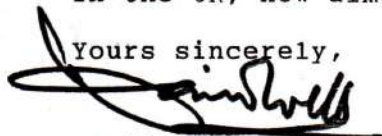
(or hostile) viewing public might well feel obliged to discount because of their obvious vested interests. I am not saying it was wrong to include their contributions, or, indeed, those of the three 'academics' also interviewed, and who could also be said broadly to support liberalisation. But with the voices and views of all the law enforcement agencies (the police, customs officers and Council enforcement officers - again all rightly included); of the statutory ruling bodies (viz the British Board of Film Classification); of the politicians (Jack Straw MP and Tom Sackville, Ex MP); an alleged 'victim' of 'pornography' ("Deborah"); and considerable screen-time afforded John Beyer, the General Secretary of the National Viewers and Listeners Association (a voluntary organisation, like our own, but campaigning on an exactly opposite platform of not simply retaining the status quo, but of even more restrictive censorship legislation), the only voice not heard (apart from a tiny comment from Mr. & Mrs. Walton) was that of the 'consumer' - or potential consumer - of sexually explicit material. Above all else, that is the NCROPA's raison d'etre - to provide a collective mouthpiece for those who like and want this kind of material but are legally denied it in this country. It was certainly unfair that the NVALA was given so large a bite of the cherry, but that a spokesperson (like myself) for the NCROPA was precluded from appearing. True, Sam Taylor had had three long telephone conversations with me about the programme, but as compared to the time, weight and exposure given to Mr. Beyer, including importantly an interview on camera, any influencing input and balancing contribution from the NCROPA was effectively nil.

(Apart from all other considerations of fairness and balance, you gave the NVALA extremely valuable and unfair free TV advertising).

Sam Taylor was, I know, looking for people to appear on vision who had felt the heavy hand of these iniquitous censorship laws. As I told him experience has taught me that there is always enormous difficulty in getting such victims to invite further publicity on themselves, an entirely understandable re-action given the largely censorious (although hugely hypocritical) public condemnation of their 'crimes' - especially by the media. This is precisely why the NCROPA exists to provide an effective and informed collective voice on behalf of such people, against such condemnation and pillory - and vigorously to campaign for the necessary changes in our laws to diminish such disapproval and vilification in future, and prevent disgraceful legal penalties - sometimes even prison! There was, thus, a significant gap in this respect in the programme which I regret.

I, personally, also regret that the philosophical and ethical argument about freedom of expression per se, and which underlies this whole issue, was virtually un-addressed, although I accept that in a 40 minute slot, it is impossible to cover everything. I would have thought, however, that at least some attention would have been drawn to the reason why virtually all other 'free' Western-World countries have long since abandoned their erstwhile sexual censorship laws, which is, of course, in recognition of this fundamental human right and which we, in the UK, now almost uniquely, are still denied.

Yours sincerely,



David Webb,
Honorary Director, NCROPA