

DIRECTOR

David Kennington, D.Litt.

NO/DAW/DP

12th August, 1983.

The Editor,
"Equity Journal",
British Actors' Equity Association,
8, Harley Street,
London, W1N 2AB.

Dear Sir,

I never thought I would live to see the day when Equity, whose members' life-blood is surely so patently dependent upon freedom of expression, would come out in support of the pro-censorship lobby. What on earth is the "Equity Journal" up to in publishing the nonsense submitted by the Women's Subcommittee headed "Women - Any Complaints" ("Equity Journal" June 1983), which urged members to complain to the appropriate body whenever they "see or hear" offensive material being used by the media?

Of course the content of "films, plays, commercials, newspapers, magazines etc." on occasions offends someone somewhere. That in itself, however, is no justification whatsoever for prohibiting such material or suppressing free expression in the media. For make no mistake about it, that is the ultimate aim of a minority of misguided 'feminists' who militate for the kind of frighteningly authoritarian controls over the media that exist in the totalitarian regimes of the Eastern Block countries, and for which we, in the supposedly free Western World constantly condemn them. It is no legitimate part of Equity's business to involve itself with such a campaign whether it originates from twisted feminist or chauvinist masculinist sources. Equity's brief is to concern itself with the professional well-being of its members and not to attempt to dictate their moral standards or direct their thought behaviour.

It is also both dishonest and, I would think, counter-productive to the eminently worthy cause of women's rights, to drag in the irrelevant issue of so-called 'pornography' and cite it as a cause of their claimed unequal treatment. We are all entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities - young or old, black or white, labour or conservative, Christian or atheist, men or women. We are not entitled, women included, to preferential rights and opportunities.

I have been a staunch supporter of equal rights for women since long before the terms 'feminist', or 'sexist', or 'women's lib' were even heard of, although I am bound to say that I have always instanced our profession as an example of one of the few exceptions where the two sexes are, in the main, treated with

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equal regard and respect, receive equal remuneration for equal work and, save for the usual and often warranted complaint that there are always more parts written for men than for women, are afforded equal opportunity, including the equal opportunity of being "offended"!

In any case, it is no bad thing that people are sometimes offended by what they see, read or hear. It would certainly be a very bad thing indeed if creative artists were to be subjected to stultifyingly repressive restraints every time someone or other objected to the way in which they chose to express themselves. Consider the intolerably absurd situation we could end up with. Ignored wife "Deirdre Barlow" would not be permitted to go back to ignoring husband "Ken" in "Coronation Street"; there would be no more 'mother-in-law' jokes from Les Dawson; "The Sweeney" would be scrapped because policemen objected to the unsympathetic way in which they were depicted in it; "Dixon of Dock Green" would be scrapped because crooks objected to the sympathetic way in which policemen were depicted in it; 'sexist' "Pretty Polly" advertisements would be banned because they showed tights modelled only on female legs; "Are You Being Served" would be axed because some male homosexuals objected to John Inman's characterisation of the effeminate "Mr. Humphries"; "Songs of Praise" would come to an end because it offended Humanists; and, of course, it would mean the demise of the "Miss World" contest because it was disapproved of by some feminists.

If Equity feels that it really cannot do without a Women's Sub-Committee, please let that committee confine itself to pertinent matters of concern for the women members and refrain from interfering in matters of individual rights and freedoms common to all our members, and which are outside its terms of reference. And while we are on the subject, why no Men's Sub-Committee?

Yours sincerely,

David Webb (Equity No. 31887),
Honorary Director,
National Campaign for the Reform of The Obscene Publications Acts