

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM  
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

DIRECTOR — David Webb, 15 Sloane Court West, Chelsea, London SW3 4TD — Tel: 01-730 9537

COMMITTEE — The Viscount Norwich, F.R.S.L., Gerald Fowler, M.A.Hon., F.A.B.E.,  
E.A.C. Goodman, LL.B.(Sol), Clifford Hanley, Pamela Manson, Eric E. Miller,  
Dr. Christine Pickard, M.B., Ch.B., Dr. Brian Richards, M.B., B.Ch., William J. Wright, B.A., M.A.I.E.  
**David Kennington, Litt.D.**

The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

NO/DAW/DP

2nd December 1983.

Geoffrey Finsberg, Esq., MBE, JP, MP,  
Standing Committee 'C',  
House of Commons,  
Westminster,  
London, SW1A 0AA.

Dear Mr. Finsberg,

Thank you for your letter of the 1st December in reply to mine of the 25th November.

The "reality" of the Video Recordings Bill is that, in section 4 on page 4, authority is given to the Secretary of State to appoint any person "as the authority responsible for making arrangements— (a) for determining for the purposes of this Act whether or not video works are suitable for showing ...". If any video work is determined not suitable for showing by the Secretary of State's appointee(s), either to children or adults, it will be banned, and anyone who subsequently supplies such a banned video work will be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of up to £10,000. That is prohibitive, repressive censorship, and pre-censorship by the State at that, whatever else it pleases you or the Bill to call it.

I appreciate that you, as a Conservative M.P. and a member of a political party which proclaims 'the freedom of the individual' as the cornerstone of its whole philosophy, will find great difficulty in reconciling your purported principles with such an unpleasant truth, but truth it certainly is, and very much in touch with reality it is also.

With regard to your speech in the House of Commons during the debate on the Second Reading of the Bill, on 11th November, I would first of all say that, if our letter and observations on the proposals for the Bill, to which you referred on that occasion, is "one of the most monstrous Letters" that you have ever received in thirteen years' membership of the House, I think you have been given an undeservedly easy ride.

I do not, of course, accept that it was a "monstrous" letter, any more than I accept the other somewhat petulant comments you made about its contents or about the N.C.R.O.P.A. and its members. I particularly resent your describing our observations as "hypocritical rubbish". The resort by a Member of Parliament to the use of unsubstantial, unconstructive criticism like "rubbish" is sad enough, but hypocrites we certainly are not. That you should so charge us, and then yourself claim that my comment about the Bill's authoritarian measures being reminiscent of those in force in some of the world's repressive

...../continued

dictatorships, is "so out of touch with reality", is, to say the least, ironic.

For your information, the N.C.R.O.P.A. is supported by people of all ages and both sexes, and different races, from all walks of life and all social strata, from all major political parties, of many differing religious beliefs or of no religious belief at all. These people include teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers of religion, magistrates, university professors, actors, artists, writers, playwrights, journalists, television producers, stage and film directors, nurses, probation officers, psychologists, psychiatrists, photographers, businessmen and businesswomen, company directors, bank clerks, models, lecturers, window-cleaners, shopkeepers, builders, dustmen and, of course, M.P.s and peers of the realm.

The N.C.R.O.P.A.'s executive committee, comprising of some very eminent names, as Jerry Hayes M.P. pointed out in his speech on 11th November, is a completely voluntary one and no-one working for the campaign in any capacity is paid, including myself. We are all motivated by a common devotion to individual freedom and hatred of repression, and by our rejection of unnecessary censorship. These are the guiding principles of our campaign and we intend to pursue its lawful course irrespective of your impertinent suggestion that "we should not try to influence the minds of honourable Members". That is exactly what we are in business to do until this country comes to its senses and discards its intolerably harsh censorship restrictions, just as nearly all other countries of the free Western World have long since done.

That last comment of yours comes dangerously close to suppression of free speech, I would have thought and, judging from your further remarks during the Standing Committee debate on 30th November, when I was also present, it does indeed appear that you are trying to gag us. If that is, in fact, the case, and I hope I am wrong, may I respectfully suggest that you are wasting your time? I and the N.C.R.O.P.A. have not the slightest intention of being gagged either by you or anyone else. You may make your intemperate, disparaging remarks about "the nonsense" you claim we advocate, you may attempt to discredit us with cheap insults and dismiss our sensible and considered critique of the Bill as "perversion", and you may utter your petty threats about strengthening the Obscene Publications Acts until you are blue in the face. We shall not be moved. In any case, our present 'obscene' publications legislation is already so draconian, any "strengthening" would not only mean mere duplication, but would be virtually unnoticeable.

It is gratifying to know, however, that whatever you may think about the N.C.R.O.P.A. personally, others do not share your views and support our aims. John Wheeler, M.P., a fellow member of Standing Committee 'C', is one such supporter. He wrote to me, on 3rd December 1979:-

"I very much applaud your approach to these issues, and I think you would like to know that I am a supporter of your philosophy".

Mrs. Jill Knight M.P., a fellow sponsor of the Bill, referred to "your excellent group" in her letter to me of 8th September 1983, and as far back as 1976, Neil Kinnock M.P. wrote to me on the 16th February thus:-

"I do uphold your views, and would happily associate myself with the Campaign. .... You can count on my support in the House of Commons if we should ever arrive at the state of amending the current Obscene Publications legislation."

I will spare you a continuation of this recital because I feel sure I have made my point.

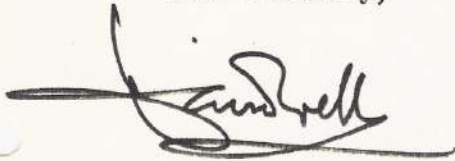
I was always doubtful whether it was possible for any rational, unemotive

...../continued

debate to be held on this Bill. The hysteria over it that has been so irresponsibly stirred up, especially by much of the press, has ensured that my worst fears materialised. If I may say so, and without wishing to be disrespectful in any way, I believe the emotive way in which you, and some others, are approaching this Bill is unintelligent, unhelpful and unworthy of elected Members of the House of Commons. We would have very much preferred to have been allowed to discuss the issues in a calm, civilised and proper way. Regrettably that course of action has been denied us. However, if it's a slanging match you're looking for, very reluctantly, but very confidently, we will take you on any day.

I do hope rather that you will reconsider your thoughts on what we have to say, on what we believe are genuinely constructive criticisms, and that you will approach our critique with new and due objectivity.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Webb', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left and then curves back under the name.

David Webb,  
Director,  
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts