

THE RT. HON. DAVID STEEL, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

13th July 1983

Dear Mr. Webb,

Thank you for your letter of 16th June. Mr. Steel as you know is taking a break just now and I am replying on his behalf.

You are entirely right when you say that it is the Liberal Party's policy to oppose censorship and to implement the general findings of the Williams Report. Naturally, there may be dissenting views within the party about aspects of this matter, but the opposition to formal state censorship remains the party policy. It isn't, of course, up to us to mention the SDP's policy on this subject, but it is worth remembering that Roy Jenkins when he was Home Secretary abolished formal theatre censorship in 1968.

This subject, as you will realise, is more complicated than a straight for-or-against state censorship. There are indirect forms of censorship which cause us concern, particularly in the government's proposals for the future of cablevision. We would like to see the cablevision stations separated from the installation of the cable itself - so that the stations have no control over the total transmission of programme material through the cable. We believe that many stations could eventually use the same cable.

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We are also concerned about the situation among video tapes, where there is evidence to suggest not just that reputable video dealers are being driven out of business by 'pirates' but also that these pirates do have connections with underground racketeers. In our Arts Manifesto, published last year and passed at a Party Council meeting on May 22nd, 1982, we refer to this problem in these terms, in the preamble which came from the Liberal Arts Panel:

"Like other boom industries (gambling, for example), video shops have attracted the attention of racketeers peddling hard-porn; and while it is not the intention of the Arts Panel to crusade against pornography, (extremely hard to define) we are alarmed that the general and surely desirable opportunities of the video market should become dominated and eventually perhaps controlled by some very vicious elements in our society indeed.

It would be an offence to handle unregistered, pre-recorded video-tapes; and the penalties that already exist should be increased and more stringently enforced. Pirated copies should be treated as any other form of stolen goods, with the distributors, retailers and purchasers all liable for prosecution. In addition, we believe that it may become necessary for the video-shops themselves to be licensed by the local authorities, whose role would not be to act as watch committees with the power to censor video-tapes but simply to ensure (by a system of spot checks) that the registration procedure is being observed."

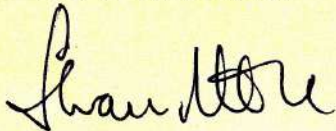
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If you would like to discuss these, and other matters, with the Liberal Arts Panel, may I suggest that you contact either the Chairman, Chris Green, or the Vice-Chairman, John Elsom, who will be pleased to have the opportunity to meet you. Their addresses are:

Chris Green
City of London Arts Trust
64 West Smithfield
LONDON EC1 9DY (01) 377 0540

John Elsom
39 Elsham Road
Kensington
LONDON W14 8HB

Yours sincerely,



Stuart Mole
P.A to David Steel

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