

HON. DIRECTOR

David Kennington Litt.D.,

Elizabeth Goodfellow BA, Alexander Barrie AADipl, MAIE

NO/DAW/DP

12th May, 1987

Michael Checkland, Esq.,  
Director General,  
British Broadcasting Corporation,  
Broadcasting House,  
London, W1A 1AA.

Dear Mr. Checkland,

At 8.15 p.m. yesterday evening (11th May), I telephoned the BBCTV Duty Officer at the Television Centre (743 8000) to lodge a complaint about certain aspects of the BBC2's "Open Space" programme "The Page Three Debate", which was transmitted at 7.30 p.m. I was explaining my feelings and the background to my complaint, admittedly forcefully but in no way offensively, when, to my utter astonishment, I was insolently and hysterically shouted down by the duty officer and the telephone connection was suddenly severed. (I'm sure it would be more accurate to say that he slammed the 'phone down on me but, in the interests of accuracy, since I did not have him in vision, I must refrain from speculation, however correct that might be!).

I immediately re-dialled the TV Centre's number but, after asking for re-connection and waiting for a considerable time after speaking to the operator, the unobtainable tone sounded and again the line was cut. For a third time I telephoned and this time I was re-connected to the duty office. When I asked for the name of the duty officer to whom I had previously spoken, I was informed that I was speaking to him but he refused to give his name. He said that they didn't give their names. When I said that I did not expect a BBC Duty Officer angrily to shout me down in the way that he had done, he said "If you say so, Mr. Webb". I then told him that I intended to make a formal complaint about his behaviour and that, in my opinion, he was obviously temperamentally unsuited to his job of duty officer. Again he replied (possibly having cooled down a bit and realised his earlier outrageous response) "If you say so, Mr. Webb". I reminded him of former U.S. President Truman's famous adage "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen".

I have been running the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) for over eleven years, since I founded it in 1976, and have made numerous complaints throughout that period to BBC Duty Officers, not to mention successive Directors-General. My complaints, hopefully a refreshing antidote to the more usual Whitehouse-type, have always been hard-hitting, but nevertheless polite and furthermore, in the light of the present Howarth Private Member's Bill and last year's Churchill Bill in Parliament, always against the concept of state censorship restraints and thus in the very pertinent long-term interests of the BBC. However I can never before recall being met with the kind of intemperate, insolent and hysterical outburst from one of your duty officers that I met last night. Whoever he is, the officer who was on duty last night, he

is unquestioningly totally unsuited to occupying a post which is, surely above all else, the BBC's first-hand, direct link with with the viewing and listening public. As a public relations practitioner, he is clearly a disaster and, in the interests of the BBC's erstwhile respected public image, I would suggest that he be removed from such a position forthwith.

In the course of making a complaint about a BBC programme, one certainly does not expect to end up having to make a complaint about the BBC's official appointed to the task of receiving and recording such complaints. I am sure you will wish to investigate and act on this serious matter.

Yours sincerely,

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