

~~CENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

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

NO/DAW/DP

14th October 1987

Michael Grade, Esq.,
Director of Programmes,
BBC Television,
BBC Television Centre,
Wood Lane,
London, W12 7RJ.

Dear Mr. Grade,

I acknowledge, with many thanks, the receipt of copies of "The Portrayal of Violence on British Television: A Content Analysis" and "Violence on Television", guidelines for production staff, which you kindly sent me at my request.

I very much regret having, at the same time, to feel it incumbent upon me to acquaint you with my considerable disquiet over personal experiences, both past and present, with BBC Television.

On Monday morning of the 28th September, I was telephoned by a researcher from the BBC "Breakfast Time" programme. They were, apparently, contemplating an item in the next morning's (29th September) edition about that day's Home Office meeting between Douglas Hurd and your Chairman, Marmaduke Hussey, and the Chairman of the I.B.A. Lord Thomson. Although the researcher did say that it wasn't definite, he asked me if I would be in for the rest of the day so that he could phone back. No call came. I got up early especially the next morning to watch the 7.00 a.m. programme. The contemplated item did not appear.

The following day I received another phone call, this time from a researcher for the "Kilroy" programme. They were contemplating a programme about "Page Three" semi-nude photographs and tabloid newspapers content. After a long grilling, I was asked if I would agree to take part. I gladly accepted and was then asked to suggest other members of the NCROPA who might be suitable participants. This I also gladly agreed to do and later spent a considerable amount of time telephoning some of my colleagues to secure their consent.

On Friday, 2nd October, the "Kilroy" researcher telephoned me again to say that the contemplated programme on the tabloid press had been scrapped, because it would be "old hat", and also because their rival programme on ITV, "....The Time....The Place" had just transmitted a similarly themed discussion.

The following Tuesday, 6th October, I received yet another phone call, this time from another researcher from the "Kilroy" programme, Ms. Lucy Pilkington. This time a programme on the age of sexual consent was being planned and I was asked, again after a lengthy grilling, if I would agree to take part. Long discussions followed and again I was asked to suggest some additional, suitable contributors to the programme. Once again, I did a lot of telephoning around to sound out and obtain the approval of colleagues. Ms. Pilkington subsequently
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rang back on October 9th and I passed on the names and addresses of two members of my Committee, one a solicitor, and the other the female editor of an internationally known magazine, who had both agreed to take part with myself in a telerecording of the programme on Monday 12th or Tuesday 13th October at Lime Grove Studios. We even discussed details of collecting cars and times of journeys.

The solicitor was subsequently telephoned later that day, October 9th, but was informed that he would not be required since he had not expressed strong views on the subject and they wanted participants with strong views.

On Monday afternoon, October 12th, at about 3.00 p.m., I was telephoned by Ms. Pilkington who gave me details of my car pick-up time for the recording the next day (yesterday). I asked who my opponent would be and was told that it was Mrs. Victoria Gillick. When I asked Ms. Pilkington if she had contacted the magazine editor I had recruited for her, she casually replied "No" and said that they had enough people now and didn't need her. Five minutes later I had my lady editor colleague on the phone who had been told nothing. I then had the embarrassing task of telling her that the BBC had discarded her like a sub-standard reject, and after she had already made complicated arrangements with her company to attend.

However, this shoddy saga of events by no means ends there. The following day, yesterday, 13th October, I was duly collected by car at my flat at 3.15 p.m. and taken to Lime Grove for, I was told, a 4 p.m. recording. On arrival there, having been initially ushered into a room with the studio audience and a NAAFI-like tea-urn, Ms. Pilkington, perhaps sensing my unease, hesitatingly asked me if I would rather go downstairs (as it turned out, although she didn't actually say so) ^{with} the 'main' guests of the programme.

In my initial discussions about appearing in "Kilroy" I had been told quite categorically that I would be one of the main speakers. I was very careful to take this precaution because I had been caught out in similar situations in the past. As the afternoon's proceedings unfolded, however, and we were positioned into our named seats on the studio set, it became horribly clear that I was not one of the main guests, but was there simply to make up the numbers of the rest of the audience. In fact I was placed right on the back row between two school-children. All the 'main' guests were seated in the front row (Mrs. Gillick included of course!) and were equipped with their own individual clip-mikes, whilst I was consigned to back-row obscurity. Just before the recording began Ms Pilkington hurriedly told me that I would be asked for my contribution during the latter part of the programme. It was already perfectly obvious to me by then that that was simply not going to happen and the programme concluded without my having contributed one single word, or having been asked to!

This kind of cavalier treatment of invited participating guests of such programmes as "Kilroy", in my view due mainly to the amateurishness and inefficiency of dilettante, and sometimes, I suspect, even lazy, researchers, who are simply looking for someone to do their donkey work for them, is certainly not uncommon among BBC staff, although not universal, of course. When it does occur, however, it is shameful and humiliating.

Furthermore, I am quite seriously beginning to wonder if the 'Mary Whitehouse Mafia' or some similar force is operating within the BBC with orders to keep the views of myself and the NCROPA off the BBC's airwaves. Consider, for example, this brief list of just some of my first-hand experiences with BBC Current Affairs programmes:-

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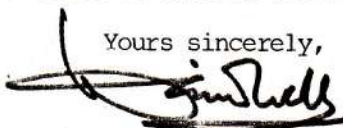
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- (1) After complaining about a BBC Radio 4 programme on 13th February 1986 called "Stripped to the Essentials", I was invited to take part in a "phone-in" on the following Tuesday - "Tuesday Call" on 18th February. My contribution was left right until the very end and consequently effectively squeezed out. All other callers had been given ample time to put their view. (Incidentally my 'squeezing-out' was even referred to by "The Observer" Radio critic Paul Ferris in his piece on 23rd Feb. about the programme).
- (2) On Friday October 24th 1980 I was interviewed outside the National theatre, having just seen a performance of "The Romans in Britain", for the BBC's "Newsnight" programme. Mary Whitehouse (who had not seen the play) and Harold Hobson, the theatre critic, were also interviewed. I returned home to watch the programme. Mrs. Whitehouse's and Harold Hobson's interviews were screened, mine was not. (The filming of this interview was witnessed by a large crowd who broke into spontaneous applause after it, and Director Christopher Morahan also watched it and congratulated me on it. I only mention this as an indication that it was of some merit and worthy of inclusion).
- (3) On Sunday November 2nd 1980, at 11.30 a.m. I recorded a radio interview with Gordon Clough for "The World This Weekend", at Broadcasting House, which I believed was one of the best interviews I've ever done. I returned home to listen to it at 1.00 p.m. It was not used.
- (4) On Monday, 29th June 1981 I was interviewed and filmed by BBC TV News outside Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court where I had organised a demonstration in protest against Mary Whitehouse's prosecution of Michael Bogdanov, Director of "The Romans in Britain". It was not used.

I will spare you a continuation of the catalogue but, notwithstanding that BBCTV, Radio, and News and most Current Affairs programmes have long since regularly been sent all NCROPA's News Releases, and notwithstanding that I have made a number of formal complaints over the years about the lack of balance in the BBC's reporting of censorship issues, particularly with regard to so-called 'obscene' publications, and the NCROPA's seemingly deliberate exclusion from these media forums, to successive Director-Generals, it seems that the bar is continuing - even in these critical days when the editorial and expressorial freedom of the BBC is so seriously threatened. When, I wonder, will someone in the BBC produce a programme on this issue which for once will allow the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts its rightful say and thus be able to put forward its realistic, rational and common-sense views, and which the NCROPA believes are the real views of the vast majority of the British public, rather than those of the 'puritan brigade'? And when, one wonders, will the BBC stop sabotaging the dissemination of these views by incidents like yesterday's fiasco at Lime Grove?

I apologise for this inordinately long letter, but very much hope that it will stimulate you into delving a little deeper into what we see as a disturbing state of affairs within BBC Television.

Yours sincerely,



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