

~~GENCENSURED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

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NO/DAW/DP

7th December 1988

Andrew Curry, Esq.,
Producer,
"Right to Reply",
Channel Four Television,
60 Charlotte Street,
London,
W1P 2AX.

Andrew Mr. Curry,

Thank you for your letter of 29th November in response to my letters to Mr. Gwynn Pritchard of 10th October and 24th October and to Mr. Michael Grade of 22nd November regarding my interview about Prince Charles' views on screen violence.

I note your explanation of why the assurances given to me by your co-producer Ms. Andrea Collett concerning the programme's acknowledgement of and credit to the NCROPA, but feel that, whilst the inefficiencies of the internal workings of the "Right to Reply" production office may be the reason for the mistake that occurred, they are no excuse.

Furthermore, your additional comments do little to assuage my long-held feelings of the often cavalier and sometimes even arrogant and hostile way in which many television 'current-affairs' personnel treat contributors, or potential contributors, to their programmes. I am very surprised, however, that this attitude appears to have spread to Channel Four - and above all to the "Right to Reply" programme. Having appeared in more than 700 television programmes as a professional actor over the past 34 years and therefore not unused to the medium, I have never encountered this phenomenon elsewhere and have always attributed the attitude of some TV current-affairs people (though by no means all, of course) to:-

- (a) A certain contempt for the media-inexperienced amateur
- (b) A condescension in allowing him or her the valuable opportunity of using their air-waves
- (c) A stubborn determination in many cases to manipulate the story/coverage/ interview to their desired angle, either by prior restrictions, subsequent editing or blatant censorship

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- (d) A smug knowledge that the contributor almost certainly needs their programme more than their programme needs the contributor
- (e) A presumption that the 'amateur' contributor is desperate merely to get his or her face 'on the telly'

and (f) My own perhaps over-sensitivity or even imagination.

Having discussed this issue with a number of others who are in no way connected with professional television but who have come into contact with it and have experienced this phenomenon, I find that I am not alone in my beliefs and that it does exist.

To return to the specific points you raised in your letter, after saying that, had you known of Ms. Collett's agreement, you "would clearly have honoured it", you then go on to say that "had I known of the agreement, I would have also been reluctant to run your interview at all"! So, in fact, you would not have honoured it. You would simply have censored the interview out of the programme altogether. That is just the kind of authoritative manipulation to which I referred earlier. The fact is, Mr. Curry, that, had I not been assured by your co-producer that the NCROPA would be properly credited, and in whose name I was acting throughout, I would not have agreed to go ahead with the interview at all.

You say that you were interested in my letter to Prince Charles "not because it came from NCROPA but because it contained important arguments about television that deserved a hearing", and you go on to say that you "would not wish to imply to our (your) viewers that it was necessary to belong to an organisation to be heard on 'Right to Reply'". Notwithstanding that it is an insult to the intelligence of your viewers, this argument is nonsense. You are completely overlooking the fact that the NCROPA is almost entirely comprised of individual members of the public - including the TV viewing public - who simply demand the right to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear. We are a 'national viewers' and listeners' organisation which represents the vast majority of the British public - the British media consumer, the 'punter' - much more accurately than any other, including Mary Whitehouse's notorious NVALA which you, the media, afford almost limitless air-time.

Neither is it true, as you imply, that "Right to Reply" is for individual viewers only. I have ^{seen} representatives/spokespersons of groups and organisations appear on the programme on many occasions. Indeed, on 18th November 1983 I appeared in the programme myself, in a discussion on the parliamentary Video Recordings Bill. I was introduced by Gus MacDonald as "David Webb of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts", and I was captioned "David Webb National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts". The programme was then edited by Ms. Liz Forgan, who is now, I believe, your Director of Programmes. I'm sure she will confirm this, or better still check it on the tape, as I have done.

In any case, your original invitation to me to participate in the programme was prompted solely by the receipt of NCROPA's press release which incorporated a copy of NCROPA's letter to Prince Charles signed by myself in my clearly stated capacity as honorary director of the NCROPA. There was never the remotest suggestion that I was writing as an individual viewer and at no time was it suggested to me or questioned by "Right to Reply" staff.

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The general implication of your explanation, which I do not accept, is that only the views of individual viewers deserve to be heard and, unless they are prepared to conform to that restrictive format, they and their views, however worthy and relevant, can get lost. What a pity you and the TV media haven't applied that criterion to Mrs. Whitehouse and her cronies over the years. Had you done so, perhaps you would not presently be bemoaning the ominous forebodings of the imminent arrival of the Broadcasting Standards Council and extension to television of the iniquitous Obscene Publications Acts.

I hope that in the next edition of "Right to Reply" you will acknowledge your error in omitting due credit to the NCROPA on 8th October. I also hope that the views and criticisms herein expressed will be regarded constructively and not jeopardise any future potential representations from and appearances of the NCROPA in "Right to Reply" programmes, or indeed in current affairs programmes on Channel Four in general, because, and as I said to Mr. Pritchard in my letter of 10th October, our cause is also your cause and we are also fighting your corner in fighting the curse of U.K. censorship.

Yours sincerely,



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

Copies to: Mr. Michael Grade, Chief Executive, Channel Four TV
Mr. Gwyn Pritchard, Editor "Right to Reply"
Ms. Andrea Collett, Producer "Right to Reply"