

Your reference:

Our reference:

Date:



METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE
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May 22, 1995

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Cllr E Goodman
Chairman
Campaign Against Censorship
23 Budgen Drive
Redhill
Surrey RH1 2QB

Dear Cllr Goodman:

Re your letter to the Commissioner dated 12.5.95 which has been passed to me for reply.

It was my office which arranged what you term the "improper publicity" regarding Operation Dare on Thursday 11.5.95.

Inspector Powell who conducted all media interviews on the day referred to the material seized as being "pornographic". This is a generic term which accurately describes the material. He did not refer to the material as being obscene, because, as you rightly point out, this is a decision for the court.

Inspector Powell expressed his opinion as a long serving police officer with many years experience in the investigation of obscene publications, that the material was "disturbing". At the stage which the comments were made there could be no question of any breach of sub judice rules as no charges had been put and no suspects named. In such circumstances it is difficult to see how any "presumption of innocence" could be contravened. Inspector Powell was expressing a professional opinion on the nature of material seized.

It would seem entirely reasonable, and indeed desirable, that the police and police operations are open to media scrutiny. It is surely in the public interest that the police inform the media of such matters and explain their actions - provided that the rules of contempt of court are not breached.

You refer to Inspector Powell's "warning" to other pornographers as a "terror tactic" designed to "frighten" publishers of video recordings. As head of an Obscene Publications Unit it is the Inspector's duty to investigate and detect those involved in the production and dissemination of obscene material contrary to the Obscene Publications Act. Any publisher of videos with no connection to these activities has nothing to fear from such investigations. Those who are may well find themselves subject to investigation. They may find themselves subjected to searches, and they may find that material is seized and put before the courts for a decision on whether it is obscene. It can come as no surprise that a police officer warns those committing illegal acts that the police are likely to pursue them.

The tone of your letter implies that the police should be prevented from talking openly about their activities. Given the title of the organisation you represent I find this somewhat surprising.

Sincerely,

S. J. Park

Steve Park

Metropolitan Police
One Area Press Office.