

NO/DAW/DP

29th May, 1981.

Kenneth Morgan, Esq.,
Director,
The Press Council,
1, Salisbury Square,
London, E.C.4.

Dear Mr. Morgan,

On behalf of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, I wish to make a formal complaint to the Press Council about the London evening newspaper "The New Standard" for refusing to publish an advertisement of ours in the Thursday, 21st May issue. A resumé of the relevant facts follows below.

On Tuesday 5th May I placed an order, in writing, for a quarter-page advertisement in "The New Standard" (copy of order enclosed herewith), at an agreed cost of £1800.00. This advertisement was in the form of an announcement regarding London's sex cinemas, the Williams Report (the Report of the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship) and censorship in this country in general. I personally delivered our cheque with the copy to "The New Standard" offices at 118, Fleet Street, E.C.4. on the afternoon of 19th May.

The following morning, 20th May, I received a telephone call from a Mr. Peter Marsh, who described himself, I believe, as their "entertainments advertising manager", to inform me that the advertisement had been refused. He did not know the reason.

I immediately telephoned the office of the managing editor, Mr. Louis Kirby but was told that he was out until 4.30 p.m. judging at an award ceremony. I was

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then connected, at my request, to the deputy editor, Mr. Roy Wright, and I asked him why our advertisement had been refused. He said that he didn't like it because it was primarily concerned with only one aspect of the so-called "obscenity" issue and that he feared its publication might give their readers the impression that they condoned our cause and campaign and agreed with the message we were trying to convey. After discussing the matter with him for some time, during which I pointed out that we were a bona fide law reform pressure group, were of serious intent, were a completely independent organisation with no commercial or business connections and had been in existence for over five years, he agreed to have another look at the copy and asked me to call him back in an hour, which I did. Mr. Wright then told me that his decision was *unchanged, that it was a personal one but made on behalf of "The New Standard" and was final.*

During the somewhat lengthy conversation which followed, I suggested, therefore, that he, a newspaper editor, was in favour of censorship. He said that he was. When I further suggested that in refusing our advertisement his action was dictatorial and that he was denying us free speech and expression, he agreed that that may well be so. He had earlier asked me if the sex cinemas referred to in our advertisement were those of the type which advertised in "The New Standard"'s entertainment columns and I said that they were. When I pointed out that, in accepting the cinema owners' advertisements, which brought in a considerable amount of regular revenue to the newspaper, whilst at the same time refusing ours, "The New Standard" was acting with gross hypocrisy, he agreed that I did have a point there. However, in spite of my prolonged pleas, he adamantly refused to change his mind and accept the advertisement. I consequently wrote to Mr. Louis Kirby, the managing editor who replied on 22nd May by saying that he fully supported the action of his deputy editor.

The editor of "The Guardian" was subsequently approached and he accepted the advertisement without reservation. It appeared on page four of last Wednesday's edition, 27th May and I enclose a photo-copy for your information. The copy is exactly the same as that submitted to "The New Standard".

As the wording of our advertisement itself indicated, we now have more censorship in this country than virtually any other of the so-called "free" Western World. We believe that it is nothing short of disgraceful that a newspaper in a country which is supposed to have a free press, should actively endorse, support even, the kind of repression referred to in the advertisement. It is doubly disgraceful when such a policy is pursued by a newspaper which is now in a monopolistic position as regards London. Remember that our advertisement specifically related to a London

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situation and we felt that "The New Standard" was the appropriate newspaper in which to place it.

Editorial freedom has always been regarded as sacrosanct. Once I also subscribed to that view but, alas, no more. Experience has shown me that such freedom in impartial, irresponsible hands is so often abused. I believe that it has been abused in this case and I find it quite deplorable.

The National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts maintains that the editor of "The New Standard"'s action in refusing to publish our advertisement was dictatorial, grossly unethical and blatant suppression of a valid point of view on a very important issue which is shared by millions -- in other words censorship of a most dangerous and improper kind. We therefore ask The Press Council to investigate this complaint and let us know its findings as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,

Organiser,

National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts

Enclosures

Copy of Order for advertisement

Copy of Advertisement as published in "The Guardian" 27/5/81

N.C.R.O.P.A. leaflet for information.