

HON DIRECTOR

David Kennington Litt.D.,

Elizabeth Goodfellow BA, Alexander Barrie AADipl, MAIE

NO/DAW/DP

24th November, 1986

M.D. Conolly, Esq.,  
Director of Marketing,  
J. Sainsbury Plc,  
Stamford House,  
Stamford Street,  
London, SE1 9LL.

Dear Mr. Conolly,

Thank you for your letter of 17th November in reply to mine of 11th November to Sir John Sainsbury.

I am glad to learn that your decision not to book any further advertising airtime during 'redtriangle', special discretion required programmes on Channel 4 TV was not influenced by Mrs. Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers and Listeners' Association representations. I do hope that Sir John will write and tell her so and instruct her not to make such dishonest claims in future.

Whilst I accept your explanation, albeit cautiously, I still deplore your reason for taking such a decision. You state that you believe it improper for commercial organisations to enter debates about what should or should not be shown on television, yet you are, in effect, doing just that by the inference in your next sentence that the content of programmes is your business and, if the TV companies do not transmit that of which you approve, you will exert a most potent, although highly improper pressure, viz the withdrawal of your advertising, which is the independent television companies lifeblood. That is censorship, even though covert censorship and even though you may claim not to condone it.

With regard to your extraordinary assertion that "the good name of Sainsbury's would be seriously compromised in the minds of our customers if our advertising continued to appear during films which featured incest and cannibalism, as the first 'red triangle' film, 'Themroc', did", are you really suggesting that the television viewers are unable to differentiate between the content and message of commercials, and the content and message (if any) of programmes; and that the viewers link an advertised product - in your case, food and drink, (incidentally thousands of people die every year as the result of alcohol) - with fictionalised, dramatised and often fantasised entertainment material? If you are, you are grossly insulting all our intelligences.

There is a move afoot, which is gathering momentum, to launch a boycott campaign against advertisers who endeavour to use their commercial muscle to

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influence and censor what the citizens of this country are allowed to see, read and hear, and the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) would certainly support such an initiative. Sainsbury's may, of course, be indifferent, even disdainful, to the threat of losing customers, whether or not it deserves to as the result of the 'Themroc' incident. However, it may interest you to know that, following on a meeting with one of your directors, Mr. Tim Sainsbury, M.P. for Hove, in February 1981, about his Indecent Displays (Control) Bill in the House of Commons, and which he conducted in so thoroughly obnoxious, arrogant, sanctimonious and supercilious a way, I elected to carry out my own, personal boycott of the King's Road, Chelsea branch of Sainsbury's, a store I had until then used regularly every week, as a protest and which I have maintained ever since. Not long afterwards that branch closed down.

That could, of course, been mere coincidence, but I don't think you should ever under-estimate the power of the consumer, or indeed forget that there are other pressure groups far more representative of the public at large than the National Viewers and Listeners' Association or the "appalling phenomenon" (John Mortimer's beautifully apt description) who presides over it, Mary Whitehouse.

Yours sincerely,

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

Copy to: Sir John Sainsbury, Chairman, J. Sainsbury Plc  
The Rt. Hon. Edmund Dell, Chairman, Channel 4 TV Ltd.