

HON. DIRECTOR

David Kennington Litt.D.,

Alexander Barrie AADipl, MAIE, Isabel Koprowski BA

NO/DAW/DP

23rd February 1989

The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hurd, CBE, MP,
Secretary of State for the Home Department,
Home Office,
50, Queen Anne's Gate,
London,
SW1H 9AT.

I acknowledge with thanks the letter, dated 17th February, from the Private Secretary, Miss C.J. Bannister, in reply to mine to yourself, dated 31st January.

I think Miss Bannister needs to be reminded that, when replying to correspondents on your behalf, she does neither you, nor herself, any credit by writing in such patronising, condescending and discourteous terms.

Her supercilious insinuations that I and the NCROPA have only now suddenly become aware of and responsive to what was contained in the Conservative Election Manifesto regarding a broadcasting white paper and the proposal to extend the Obscene Publications Acts to broadcasting, or the inference that our present concern is our first reaction to these issues, are insulting and, as you know, grossly inaccurate. (For the record, I first raised the subject with Mr. Norman Tebbit, then Chairman of the Conservative Party, on 13th May 1987 and again after the publication of the manifesto on 21st May 1987). For Miss Bannister's information, the NCROPA has been in active operation for the past thirteen years, during all of which time it has been vigorously and intelligently campaigning in all areas for a modicum of sanity to permeate this country's shamefully out-moded, unjust and repressive censorship laws. That we haven't yet succeeded, because of the intransigence, stupidity and, often, dishonesty of successive governments, is no justification for her curt dismissiveness.

To be strictly accurate, Miss Bannister is, anyway, incorrect in saying that "both initiatives (regarding the extension of the O.P. Acts to broadcasting and the creation of the Broadcasting Standards Council) were included in the Government's Election Manifesto in June 1987." What the manifesto actually said was:-

"The responsibility for enforcing broadcasting standards must rest with the broadcasting authorities. The present Broadcasting Complaints Commission has a relatively narrow remit. But there is a deep public concern over the display of sex and violence on television. We will therefore bring forward proposals for stronger and more effective arrangements to reflect that concern."

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Nowhere is there any mention of the creation of a statutory Broadcasting Standards Council or that its powers would supercede those of the present various broadcasting authorities. Furthermore, the B.S.C. may have been "in place since June of last year" (my correspondence files and our recent written submission to their code of practice consultation exercise bear witness enough to that!), but its statutory establishment has still to be enacted in legislation which, at this stage, is still only in 'White Paper' - not even in 'Bill' form, and, in any case, is still, as yet, unincorporated in law.

Neither do we accept the view that there either was, or is, "major public concern being expressed about the level of sex and violence portrayed in all forms of broadcasting." All the really reliable and credible research, like that carried out by the I.B.A. and that commissioned by the B.B.C., endorses our view. That is why we dispute the need for such a body as the B.S.C. and why we are requesting an urgent meeting with you or Mr. Renton so that we can discuss these matters as well, of course, as our opposition to the extension of an Obscene Publications Act which we have long since deeply deplored and wish, in any case, largely to be removed.

Since you took office as Secretary of State, there have been a number of occasions when we have respectfully asked for a meeting with you, all of which requests have been refused. However these present particular issues arising from the White Paper, which will have such serious and far-reaching repercussions for all broadcasters, are by far the most important to date. We

We do not agree that a meeting with us would be unproductive, unless, of course, it took place between parties with deaf ears and closed minds, a circumstance which would make a mockery of your department's well-publicised wish to consult with all interested sides and all shades of opinion. We are certain that that is not your intention and therefore earnestly urge you to reconsider your rejection of such a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

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