

HON. DIRECTOR

NO/DAW/DP

30th October 1989

The R.t. Hon. GERALD Kaufman, M.P.,
House of Commons,
Westminster,
London,
SW1A 0AA.

Thank you for your letter of 27th October in reply to mine of 26th October.

Unlike yourself, I do not find murder threats "silly", and neither, I'm sure, does Salman Rushdie. Nor do I find "silly" the refusal of our law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who make such threats.

On 22nd February this year, I wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions, supplying him with the names of nine people who had, like Dr. Siddiqui, clearly breached the criminal law by publicly endorsing the late Ayatollah Khomeini's 'death sentence' on Salman Rushdie and stating that they would be prepared to carry it out themselves. I asked the D.P.P. whether or not he intended to issue legal proceedings against these nine people and if not, why not? The letter was unanswered so, on 15th March, I wrote a reminder. The D.P.P.'s office's reply to that, on 20th March, said that he appreciated the concerns expressed in my letter and assured me that "these will be taken into account when any possible prosecution is considered".

Since the questions posed in my original letter had still not been answered by this reply, I wrote again to the D.P.P. on 22nd March and again asking if the people I had named were to be prosecuted. The D.P.P.'s Joint Director of Headquarters Casework replied to that letter on 8th May. He said that a decision had already been made that "the public interest does not require a prosecution" against two of those I had named and that, with regard to the other seven, his office had not had any cases involving them referred to it. It was, he said, "open to you (me) to show the police any evidence that you (I) possess and to request them to commence an investigation", and he went on to say that all relevant factors that may be reported to him in deciding whether or not to commence or continue a prosecution will be given "careful consideration".

It is in the context of that advice that I have laid the information about Dr.

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Siddiqui and the Manchester meeting before the Greater Manchester Police. If you think that is "silly" ~~AND~~ ignorant", may I suggest that you make that criticism to the Director of Public Prosecutions and not to me.

I do however accept what you say about not being present at the point when Dr. Siddiqui actually made his speech, but, having played back the recording of the BBC TV News report of the meeting, which did not make this clear, but which, in any case does not affect the main thrust of my letter, I cannot be blamed for this misunderstanding. Anyway, the Chief Constable of Manchester will no doubt ascertain who was and who was not present during his investigation. The film certainly shows that the Bishop of Manchester was still present.

Nevertheless, I am glad to have your emphatic condemnation of "incitement to murder Mr. Rushdie" and that you are against the ban on his book. What I and the N.C.R.O.P.A. now await, however, is some positive action from our elected representatives in Parliament insisting that those who flagrantly break the criminal law be brought to justice and that the law is upheld without fear or favour. There is nothing "ignorant" in calling for such action. To the contrary, there is something highly enlightened in championing freedom, including freedom of expression alongside freedom of religion.

My case, as you put it (I assume you mean the case against censorship), and for which you claim my letter does "no good", is strong enough to stand up against any opposition. But if you are going to allow your own assessment of it to be determined by petty and irrelevant considerations of personal hurt caused by a few words of frank, written criticism, instead of on its ~~own intrinsic merits~~ merits, we might, all of us, just as well pack up now! It is not only my case. It is your case, and everybody else's case too, if only they could realise it. You do it a grave disservice by so trivialising it.

Finally, with regard to your last sentence, I am sorry you think my letter is "objectionable", although I certainly do not accept that there was anything in it which could be so termed. Neither do I accept that it was "stupid". I don't write "stupid" letters, although I must admit that I do often receive "stupid" replies.

Yours sincerely,

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

P.S. I am enclosing a copy of an article I was invited to write for the June edition of "The Freethinker", which I hope will be of interest.