

Panorama File

Hyman
24/4

P. Sheehy

E. D. Oxberry

EDO/SEY

16th April, 1980

Letters to Press

Further to the meeting yesterday, at which it was decided that we would go through the press coverage of Panorama and write individual letters where appropriate, we are now of the opinion that on balance this would be disadvantageous in the light of the following analysis :

1. Daily Mirror 14.4.80

The reference to Dr. Green is incorrect. He does not say in the programme that he "advised BAT" of his views. However, as this was probably written from a BBC press release and possibly a telephone call from the journalist to the BBC, the reference is almost certainly a misunderstanding. The Daily Mirror would not publish a letter of the sort we planned to write and would only apologise if they published anything on our behalf. In the process, however, we would draw further attention to the programme in the Mirror. They wrote nothing after the programme, so it is best left in our opinion.

2. The Guardian 15.4.80

In the leader, they do not refer to BAT, only to the quotation regarding private views and public policy, which they attribute to the industry as a whole. We could not object unless we were to identify the source of the document, which we do not want to do, or if we wished to respond on behalf of the industry, which is not our role.

In the TV Critics' column, Dr. Green is only quoted on his "on tap rather than on top" statement which is fairly innocuous.

3. Daily Mail 15.4.80

This article attributes the private view/public policy difference to the industry as a whole, not specifically to BAT. It quotes what Jim Green said, but does not say anything not already covered in Panorama. Again, a letter from us would not be published in full, and a small paragraph apologising - which in any case is unlikely - would draw further attention to the programme in the newspaper.

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It is also worth noting that this was a TV Critic, not a main editorial piece.

4. Daily Telegraph 15.4.80

This piece points out that Jim Green is "now on the other side", which seriously undermines his credibility in my view. The article is sympathetic, and a recent Telegraph leader demonstrates the newspaper's favourable attitude towards the industry.

These are the only cuttings so far which mention BAT specifically.

We discussed this with Stuart Alexander, and the TAC intends not to write on behalf of the industry for similar reasons. I have discussed it with Richard Haddon, who also agrees.

We have reconsidered the question of the Sunday newspapers, which might be preparing stories based on Panorama. Again, we have concluded that writing to them would simply draw their attention not so much to the programmes, but more importantly to our sensitivity regarding Jim Green, and this would undoubtedly excite more speculation on their part. If they are doing any in-depth pieces on Jim Green, they will do them anyway, and if in the process they suggest the "private view/public policy" difference with regard to BAT, then we will have a right of reply, which we could expect to be published at length the following week.

Underlying the whole of our thinking is the assurance from the American lawyers that there is nothing further to be achieved legally by writing to the press, on the basis of what we have seen so far.

Finally, in our view we should now watch and wait for further press comment, and review each case as it arises, then determine whether a letter is appropriate. Meanwhile, we are putting in hand the letter to Trethowan.

I attach the relevant cuttings.

Encs.

C.C.
R. Haddon
H. A. Morini

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