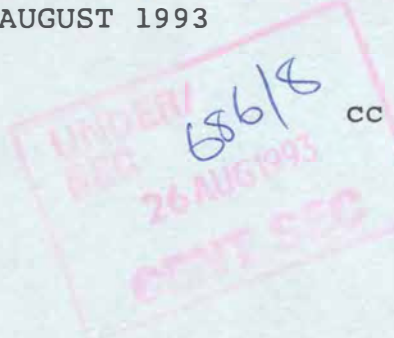


FROM: A WOOD
DIRECTOR, INFORMATION SERVICE
25 AUGUST 1993



cc PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Templeton
Mr Woods
Mr Percival



in Mr. Under (B&L)

Mr. Watkins
for file
Done
25/8

PS/Sir J Wheeler (B&L)

TV ADVERTISEMENTS - PUBLIC REACTION

The Minister will wish to know that critical public reaction to the adverts (as opposed to the private criticism voiced by the NITB) has been so minimal as to be almost non-existent.

UTV have had, I am told by the Independent Television Commission, about five complaints. The ITC locally has had one which has produced a very robust but reasoned reply (copy attached) from Don Anderson, the Northern Ireland Officer and ITC headquarters has had none.

(signed)

A WOOD
SC Ext 28211

21985



Independent Television Commission

Mr [REDACTED]

Knock
Belfast

18 August 1993

Dear Mr [REDACTED]

I have now had the opportunity of talking to both our head office, to UTV and others.

It might surprise you to know that after a month of screenings yours was the first letter of complaint to us about the Northern Ireland Office advertisements. UTV has received a very small number of complaints. It would appear that the advertisements are not causing general or widespread discomfort.

Part of the reason, as I know you appreciate, is the context within which advertisements of this nature are possible, even necessary. There is a terrorist war being fought. Children are among those being killed, injured, maimed, psychologically damaged and left fatherless, motherless and homeless. Many would say that the war is being fought for the good of the next generation, who are today's children.

You describe the advertisements as going beyond reasonable levels in depicting violence, but the situation they seek to confront is one of real violence beyond reasonable levels. Normally we would be very loath to pass such violence in an advertisement, but this is not a normal situation. These are advertisements issued by a department of government doing its best to prevent further inroads into the fabric of normality.

There can be little doubt that the advertisements are being effective. The police will not compromise the confidentiality of the confidential telephone, but they have said that there has been an increase in effective response to the confidential telephone. This phone line has resulted in the discovery of a large number of guns, of significant quantities of ammunition and explosives and has led to valuable convictions in the courts.

It is reasonable to conclude that a greater good is achieved by screening the advertisements, with the nine o'clock restrictions for some of them, notwithstanding the fact that some children will see them (no watershed will ever be effective in preventing children seeing adult television). I recognise that after nine o'clock the advertisements appear without warning, as is the case with every advertisement, but to be effective they must hit the target audience. Pushing them later into the evening simply reduces their effectiveness and it can be argued that this is not in the interests of any children in Northern Ireland.

I should point out, as UTV may have done already, that the screening of the advertisements is controlled beyond the simple watershed. For example, the advertisements were not permitted near last week's programme **When Did You Last See Your Father**, which was about the suffering inflicted upon children by politically motivated violence.

Indeed, the programme itself might be seen as making the case for screening the advertisements. Their potential for reducing the effect of real violence upon children must surely far outweigh possible effects of dramatised violence upon children.

Nor do I feel that the advertisements 'legitimise' violence in any way, certainly not to the point where some people might be tempted copy the dramatised action. Again, real life far surpasses the horror.

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And the horrors pre-date these advertisements by decades. It follows that if the people involved are copying anything, it is most unlikely to be these advertisements.

I fully recognise that you feel strongly about the advertisements. I and countless others share a longing for a time when peace will have returned, when people in government would not consider such advertisements necessary. If you wish, I will pass your letter to one of the men behind the present confidential telephone campaign. He has told me he would be happy to write to you directly.

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I hope this is helpful. I cannot be certain of the outcome of the advertisements but in the last analysis I do feel that they are worth trying. Many weapons are double-edged, but that has always been the tragedy inherent in solving problems by means of violence.

Yours sincerely,

Don Anderson

Officer for Northern Ireland

