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Press Complaints Commission

From the Chairman

Sir Bernard Ingham
Secretary
SONE
c/o BNES: 7 Great George Street
London
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10th February 2005

Chairman
Sir Christopher Meyer
Members of the Commission
Matti Alderson
Roger Alton
Professor The Lord Chan
Edmund Curran
Paul Dacre
Jane Ennis
Mary Francis
Dr. Arthur Hearnden
Vivien Hepworth
Peter Hill
Paul Horrocks
Charles McGhee
Adam Phillips
Eve Salomon
Dianne Thompson
The Right Rev. John Waine KCVO
Director
Tim Toulmin

Jean Bernard,

Thank you for your letter of 6th February. It was excellent to hear from my old mentor, whom I repeatedly cite as the best government spokesman since 1945. I have asked my secretary to fix up a lunch – something I should have done ages ago.

As to your letter – your robustness of expression has lost nothing in the passage of the years – allow me to make a few observations. None of us in Salisbury Square is an expert on power generation as you are. We are no doubt poorer for this; and there will be many other specialised areas where the PCC will be unable to match the knowledge of the experts.

But, at the risk of provoking a Krakatoan explosion, I submit that this is beside the point. The merits of nuclear power, as opposed to other forms of energy generation, are controversial. If it were otherwise, there would not be an organisation call SONE and you would not be its Secretary. I recently followed an intense controversy in an American magazine, in which experts blazed away at each other about the relative merits of nuclear, wind, water, coal, oil, gas, pig manure – all of them citing what appeared to be impeccably conducted research.

It is not for us at the PCC to pick our way through those controversies and make an *ex cathedra* ruling on who is right. It is our role to make a judgement on whether a publication was entitled to write what it wrote, consistent with the Code of Practice. That is what we did in this case; and I would enjoin you to read the adjudication again, in this light. In the last analysis, *New Scientist* presented a view with which you disagree. The magazine is entitled to its opinion. The remedy was to have written a letter for publication in the magazine, setting out the SONE view (as opposed to seeking a correction, which I gather from the correspondence is what wanted).

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You will be pleased to know that issues of accuracy provide the bulk of our work. Intrusion into privacy, contrary to what you might expect from reading the press (!), is of lesser concern to those who seek our help.

I hope the above does not deter you from coming to lunch.

Yours ever,



Sir Christopher Meyer