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Dispatches – The Truth about Traveller Crime

We are writing to express our concerns regarding last Thursday's Dispatches programme "The Truth about Traveller Crime"

Far from expressing the truth about "Traveller Crime" the programme appeared to be intent on branding all of the travelling communities as "Criminal" based solely on the activities of a tiny minority of community members. Even on the 30 sites selected as being sites where ASB and crime had been reported, all that the programme makers could identify was largely what could be described as "low level" level ASB of the sort that could be witnessed in many areas occupied by the settled (i.e. non-Gypsy or Traveller) community. Why did the programme makers focus purely on Gypsy/Traveller sites if they wanted to highlight such kinds of ASB? Would they (or, indeed, Channel 4) ever dream of making a similar programme about crime/ASB in other communities or is it just that Gypsies and Travellers (the programme seemed to be unable to identify between the two communities) are seen as fair game?

We are not saying that all Gypsies and Travellers are angels. All communities (regardless of ethnicity) have their bad elements. By focussing purely on the bad element, however, the programme succeeded in criminalising the entire community in the eyes of the general public. Where was the balance? The counter-narrative? As the random sample survey referenced in the programme showed, on and in the immediate vicinity of 56% of sites the crime rate is below the national average (with it being 1/3rd below the national average on 30% of the sampled sites).

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Why wasn't this the message of the programme? Why not have called the programme "Exploding the Myths about Traveller criminality"? We suspect that the answer to that may be that this was always going to be a title in search of a programme – hence once those responsible for this programme had their title they were really only interested in things that supported their pre-existing views. Just a few days before the programme was broadcast the Government produced its "COVID-19 – MITIGATING IMPACTS ON GYPSY & TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES" guidance in which it states that:

"To enable compliance with COVID-19 public health guidance on hygiene requirements, access to basic facilities is essential. This might involve the provision of additional temporary water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities to those currently lacking access to these, or making alternative stopping places available, such as transit sites, suitable local authority land, and holiday campsites which may have closed and have established facilities".

How exactly do you think that this programme will help local authorities to comply with the guidance? What do you think that the reaction of members of the settled community who watched the programme will be towards Gypsies and Travellers? To answer that, it is notable that Gypsy and Traveller NGOs have reported an increase in hate crime incidents towards the travelling communities since the programme was broadcast.

This was lazy, inept "journalism". "Car crash" TV at its worst. The sad thing is that this could potentially have been an informative and useful programme but important messages regarding multiple deprivation, the lack of sites and poorer outcomes were drowned under a relentless tide of cheap sensationalism.

We understand that Channel 4 may be considering an apology for broadcasting this programme. Whilst an apology would be welcome it would not be enough. The damage has already been done. As the programme makers have admitted they found it difficult to get "buy in" from community members and their representative organisations (owing largely to previous negative experiences with regard to the

media). This biased and misleading programme will not only have slapped the door on any future co-operation but locked, bolted and barred it.

We look forward to receiving your response to this letter

On behalf of NFGLG Committee



Policy Officer Adrian Jones

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