

OPPOSITION PRESS RELEASE 112/2009 : MR CARUANA'S ATTEMPT AT CENSORSHIP IS CHARACTERISTIC AND HAS DAMAGED GIBRALTAR

The Opposition considers that a golden opportunity has been missed to remind people in the UK that all the hostility Gibraltarians have been subjected to by Spain started with Her Majesty's visit in 1954 and the rapturous welcome we gave her, for which successive Spanish Governments have been punishing our people now for over half a century. Instead, regrettably, Mr Caruana portrayed himself on the "On Tour with the Queen" programme as a small minded petty dictator doing the "dignity of his office", as he likes to call it, no good at all.

Mr Caruana is being accused in this Channel 4 programme in UK of placing pre-conditions on a journalist in order to agree to be interviewed over the events of 1954. His attempt at curtailing the freedom of the press led the journalist to openly state, when the programme was aired, that there exists in Gibraltar censorship of the press.

The programme was the last of a series of four documentaries about Her Majesty the Queen's 1954 tour which included Gibraltar, this last stop causing great controversy in Spain and triggering off Franco's campaign against Gibraltar. The journalist from Channel 4 thought it might be a good idea to interview someone in Spain who was around at the time, but was categorically told that if he did this, Peter Caruana would refuse to be interviewed. The journalist also claims that by co-incidence, two other people from Gibraltar who were to be interviewed cancelled their appointment when this happened. He clearly thinks they were got at.

He said in the programme that having visited all the Commonwealth countries toured by the Queen in 1954, including African countries, only in Gibraltar had he found press censorship.

This time, Peter Caruana's bullying approach towards the media in order that his views alone get covered, have been seen for what it is. He has given Gibraltar the image of a banana republic and in one stroke helped the campaign against Gibraltar orchestrated by sections of the Spanish media which already depict us as if we were a banana republic. It appears that because he gets away with pressurising some journalistic institutions locally, something the Opposition has already highlighted on innumerable occasions, he thinks he can also do this to professionals coming from abroad who are experts in recognising the kind of despotism displayed by Peter Caruana. The journalist in question, as a professional that he is, seems to have agreed to the conditions imposed on him by Peter Caruana because he was presented with another more important story on a plate, that Gibraltar's Chief Minister, despite portraying Gibraltar as a bastion of democracy, is involved personally in press censorship through blackmail; "either you do what I say or I will not give you what you want". What is worse about this autocratic approach is that it stems from a belief by Peter

Caruana that he alone has the God given right to speak on behalf of Gibraltar as if this were a one party state. A second view to his is inconvenient for Peter Caruana, so he tries to ensure that only his views and opinions appear in the media. This time, however, he seems to have wanted to exclude an opinion from someone in Spain, thereby showing weakness, as if in Gibraltar we are unable to counter any negative comments made, if indeed the person that was to be interviewed was expected to make negative comments.

Opposition Spokesman for the Media, Fabian Picardo, had this to say: "It will not come as a surprise to people in Gibraltar that Peter Caruana has attempted to control the actions of a journalist in the exercise of his duty because he has done this before. What is new is that he should have tried it on a reporter from abroad and from such a prestigious and popular UK broadcaster as is Channel 4 on a prime time programme. It is certainly a disgrace to have exposed our community to such negative commentary in a prime time programme. What with using the Heads of State Lounge at Gatwick Airport, travelling surrounded by bodyguards and advisers as if he were the US President, and now this, it would seem that the office he holds has gone to his head. It is time he moved on."

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