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Jeremy Paxman
c/o The Producers of 'Empire'
British Broadcasting Corporation
Media Centre
201 Wood Lane
London
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28 March 2012

***Empire*, episode one, 'A Taste for Power' – your interview with Sarah Agassi**

Dear Mr Paxman

We are writing in respect of episode one of your series *Empire*, first aired on BBC1 on Monday 27th February 2012 at 9.00 pm. We wish to take issue with your treatment of Sarah Agassi, who was a perpetrator of the King David Hotel bombing on 22 July 1946.

This letter is on behalf of my father, Reginald Baker, who was a dispatch rider for the Royal Army Ordnance Corps stationed in Palestine between Petah Tikva and Qalquilya, from March 1946 to February 1948. He visited the scene of the bombing only two days afterwards, and remembers the carnage and mutilated bodies distinctly – including that of the British postmaster general of Jerusalem, which had been blown across the street to stain its shape against the white walls of the YMCS building opposite.

My father feels that your treatment of Ms Agassi was inappropriate. He assumes that the time since the bombing, and the fact that most of people alive at the time have now passed away, has clouded the judgement of yourself and the producers.

As you know, Ms Agassi and the Irgun organisation of which she was a member placed a bomb in the King David Hotel, which was the headquarters of the British Army and the Palestine Government, killing 91 people (including 41 Arabs and 17 Jews) and injuring at least 46 others. The bombing was a high point in a terrorist campaign against the British, which included drive-by shootings, road-side bombs (after which survivors were often executed), and the murder and mutilation of the British sergeants Mervyn Paice and Clifford Martin.

My father particularly recalls that there was deep bitterness among British troops at the time, given that the defeat of Nazi Germany, just a year earlier, had been so central to the continued wellbeing of the Jewish people, whose interests Irgun claimed to protect. I'm sure we all recall that the British Army played a not insubstantial part in the Nazi's defeat.

Given your reputation as an interviewer, we felt you gave Ms Agassi a remarkably sympathetic hearing. We imagine that, were you to interview an individual complicit in a more recent terrorist outrage of similar scale – say the 2002 Bali Bombings – you would not casually wander around the nightclubs where they'd spread so much death, enquiring as to their "sense of morality" regarding their actions.

My father notes that Ms Agassi seemed to be in good health, and has been fortunate enough to live the long life she helped deny to so many others, and that she does not appear to have been held accountable for the mass murder in which she was complicit. You asked Ms Agassi (who was apparently “satisfied” regarding the attack) whether she felt “grateful to the British” for the Balfour Declaration. Maybe you should have asked her whether she was grateful to Britain for its actions during World War II.

Finally, as a member of the British armed forces at the time, my father would like to dispute your dramatic assertion at the end of the programme that the British “ran away” from Palestine. He points out that, in fact, the British ruled the country under a mandate originally set up under the League of Nations, and they gratefully withdrew when that mandate ended. The assertion that they “ran away” is incorrect, and is certainly not in keeping with the feeling among British troops at the time.

We hope that you will note these thoughts of a veteran of the Palestine campaign, and that both you and the producers of *Empire* will bear them in mind when making future documentaries, or conducting similar interviews.

Yours sincerely

Peter Baker

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e EMAIL

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cc The Royal British Legion
Jeremy Paxman c/o Performing Artists