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Mad Max: Beyond the Blunderdome

From: **Jenny Randles** <nufon@currantbun.com>
Date: Sat, 12 Jun 1999 15:08:56 +0100
Fwd Date: Sun, 13 Jun 1999 13:14:10 -0400
Subject: Mad Max: Beyond the Blunderdome

Hi,

All this stuff about Max Burns brings up a critical issue about UFO credibility and the way we present ourselves in public. Surely that ID the issue here. It is what BUFORA utterly failed to read. They did the same thing with the fawning over the Santilli autopsy fiasco. Although I dare say they might - not unreasonably - cast back the point against various Sheffield events that, for instance, the IUN invited the likes of Budd Hopkins - when he is (without medical qualification) regressing five year old children and promoting the image of nasty grays raping humans. Somehow there is not a lot of difference here. Both are apparently honest ufologists expressing a view that most of us consider not only fundamentally wrong but potentially destructive. We may hate these opinions but can we honourably suppress them all?

My argument here is not that BUFORA were right. I don't think they were. Free speech is no substitute for allowing nonsense to be set before the public in your name. But the point is one that requires deeper consideration as to a degree we all do the same thing without probably being aware of that fact. So - perhaps, a general consensus that we could agree and issue as a proclamation about is what we need to emerge from this mess. If we agree to abide by this working practice we would set an example to Ufology.

What example? Let us all take the decision here and now that any public event we organise involve the invitation only of serious researchers who can put forward hard evidence with a demonstrably scientific basis and who do not endorse patently absurd, unscientific ideas without support. Nor that we should invite anyone who sets before the public a scenario that has

damaging moral or ethical repercussions. As these things require common sense and someone to make a value judgement we don't want to set ourselves up as the thought police. So I suggest we agree a second principle, if we make a value judgement and yet someone whom we invite still clearly offends the sensitivities of people out there - such responsible criticism should be heeded. If it is apparent there is concern over an invite then a free vote is offered over the net - a simple yes/no to whether that person should be considered suitable for invite and that the decision to run with that lecturer or to cancel the invite be abided by whatever the outcome of this vote.

Otherwise we face the question of setting ourselves up to make moral choices about who should be empowered to speak and who should not. I don't see how we can fairly do that. For the record I would certainly have voted no to Max Burns - except had there been a two way lecture (i.e. Max versus David so the audience could judge the case side by side). This is exactly what I proposed to BUFORA Council over the Santilli farce - that he be allowed a platform at Sheffield in 1995 only if the alternative perspective was simultaneously offered to allow free debate and let the audience make fair judgement. As you know BUFORA scuppered that plan and left themselves open to what are therefore utterly justified criticism to this day over the way they aided and abetted the autopsy promo.

So when it came to Max Burns, I did not scream and shout at BUFORA - I protested quietly by declining to promote the lecture and by not accepting an invite to lecture to BUFORA during the next 12 months. My point was thus, I trust, made without fanfare.

Rather than us now argue over a lecture that happened and which, frankly, by trying to stop probably made it seem more interesting to some than it deserved to be, lets stop blaming some and shouting at others and do something positive instead. Let us agree a declaration like I have just set out (that obviously needs fine tuning) and those of us who accept it - on behalf of ourselves and groups we represent - then issue it as a proclamation to the UFO world ASAP encouraging other UFO groups to sign up to the initiative. The plan would be to demonstrate globally that we are voluntarily setting standards as regards to the people we invite to give our public lectures - even if it means not inviting some whose dramatic claims and media stardom would attract audiences and put money into our coffers. We are putting the principle of only promoting good, serious, defensible research and theorising first and any personal gain second. This will send a small message that we do care about self policing ufology and making efforts to do the right thing by educating the public - surely one of our primary aims.

To me doing this is a positive outcome from the Santilli and Max Burns affair. We will be turning it on its head and taking a step forward on behalf of ufology. So why not? Lets stop fretting over a lecture that's been and gone and use it as a springboard to agree a simple, straightforward but constructive policy initiative for ufology.

Comments please.

Jenny Randles

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