

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

1999
SPRING

GOVERNMENT ACTS ON TV PORN

The Government has taken action against hard-core pornographic broadcasts by the satellite TV channel 'Eros TV'.

Speaking in November last year, Broadcasting Minister Mrs Janet Anderson said:

"Hard-core broadcast pornography is not acceptable in this country. We simply cannot tolerate broadcasting of graphically explicit material of this kind.

"I received notification from the ITC of a pornographic service, 'Eros TV', which the Commission considers to be unacceptable and should be the subject of a Proscription Order. I have viewed the channel and consider that a Proscription Order would be in the public interest.

"In accordance with the terms of the EC Broadcasting Directive, the broadcaster, the French authorities and the European Commission have been notified that we consider this service to have manifestly, seriously and gravely infringed the Directive's provisions on the protection of children.

"If we are unable to resolve this matter within 15 days of this notification and the

broadcaster continues to transmit such offensive programmes, we shall proceed to make an Order effectively proscribing the service in the United Kingdom.

"We are determined to protect children from satellite pornography and my message to pornographers is clear. We will not tolerate material such as this on our television sets, and the Government will not hesitate to take this action again in the future."

Although a Proscription Order has already been issued against **'Eurotica Rendez-Vous'**, the Channel 5 series **'Sex and Shopping'** nevertheless featured interviews with officials from **'Eurotica Rendez-Vous'** promoting the hard-core pornography they transmit and challenging the Government's ruling.

The ITC has also recommended that the Government issues another Proscription Order against 'Channel Bizzare', because "the service repeatedly included explicit material which offended against good taste and decency".

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE

"It has always been our practice and privilege to recognise excellence in television," said Rev Graham Stevens, National VALA's President at the Annual Award presentation.

"In 1997 the outstanding media event was the coverage of the funeral of the Princess of Wales. It was handled with great dignity and was a fine example of professional teamwork in broadcasting".



L-R: James Whitbourne & Anne Gilbert from the BBC, Fiona Baird-Murray of ITN, Nick Pollard from Sky News, and Baron Deedes of Aldington, who presented the Award

Lord Deedes of Aldington had just returned from Yugoslavia but said that he had gladly

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (Members Only)

SATURDAY 15th MAY 1999

2.00pm - 4.00pm

at

THE PORTMAN ROOM
ST PAUL'S CHURCH
ROBERT ADAM STREET
LONDON W1

Light refreshments available

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DIRECTIONS AND TRAVEL

Robert Adam Street is off Baker Street and St Paul's Church is signposted

The nearest Underground stations are Baker Street, Bond Street & Marble Arch

Bus routes along Baker Street are 2B, 82, 113, 159 and 274.

There is a National Car Park - Portman Square Garage - in nearby Gloucester Place.

There are parking meters in the vicinity.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE

made the journey to present the Awards out of respect for Mary Whitehouse and the work of the Association she founded.

Lord Deedes presented the Annual Award jointly to James Whitbourne and Anne Gilbert from the BBC, Fiona Baird-Murray from ITN and Nick Pollard and Martin Stanford from Sky News. They all said how much they appreciated receiving an award from an organisation representing viewers and listeners. The coverage of the funeral had been a massive undertaking and one in which they had cooperated as never before. ➤ *cont'd on page 3*

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

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CORRUPTING OUR SOCIETY

Since the 1960's a policy of non-intervention in matters of programme content regulation has prevailed. In a written answer to Desmond Swane MP on 14/12/98, Janet Anderson, Minister for Broadcasting, stated that "Broadcasters are subject to the general law and are required to comply with the regulators' guidelines on programme content. It is a longstanding and, I believe, a fundamental principle that Government does not intervene directly in issues of broadcasting content. Responsibility for enforcing the rules lies with the regulators who are charged with safeguarding the public interest". The Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP, when addressing the British Video Association in November 1996 said that such regulation should be carried out with "the lightest possible touch".

This attitude has had a noticeable effect on TV standards of taste and decency so much so that a Sunday newspaper recently reported that the last sexual taboo is to be broken on British television as Channel 4 prepares to broadcast a documentary which examines bestiality. One of the interviews being considered for the programme is with a man who is "married" to a horse. In correspondence with this Association the ITC said that advance press reports are "unreliable" and that the programme would be monitored upon transmission in the normal way. Should the report, the truth of which was not denied, be taken seriously?

On 6 October Channel 4 screened a programme in its 'Renegade tv' series entitled 'Sex Pest'. This was a 45-minute promotion where "counter culture breaks through into the mainstream" for the "Campaign for Erotic Democracy" in America. As well as many sexually explicit images, including bondage and domination, part of the programme demonstrated anal stimulation. We referred this programme to the Broadcasting Standards Commission and their advice to Channel 4 was that this part was "too explicit for broadcast on a terrestrial programme".

In recent months there have been many other programmes which have included scenes of explicit sexual conduct which, we believe, clearly defy the Programme Codes and the Producers' Guidelines. The public pays for and trusts the Broadcasters to provide good programmes that comply with the statutory requirements. They also expect the exercise of some sanctions against those who are plainly failing in their public duties. They look to Parliament to act on their behalf against the very powerful media interest. Those who fund Independent Television with huge sums of money carry a responsibility too because it is the advertising revenue from business and commerce that finances the corruption of our society and its people.

TOLERANCE IS NOT APPROVAL

According to a survey published by the Broadcasting Standards Commission in January, attitudes towards the portrayal of sexual activity on television have become more tolerant in the last six years.

However, although the changes which have taken place indicate a more relaxed attitude by the majority, there is also a suggestion that the number of people who think there is too much sex on television is on the increase. This most recent survey, conducted in the late summer of 1998, suggests that the trend may have changed, with the number saying there was too much sex on television increasing from 32% to 36%.

Whilst the majority (78%) believe that sexual activity should be seen if it is central to the storyline, there is also a high degree of cynicism. Almost three-quarters of respondents said that most sex on TV was used by broadcasters to boost ratings.

Attitudes towards the depiction of homosexual relationships have also changed considerably since 1992. Then, 46% said that it was acceptable to show gay relationships on screen; by 1998 that figure had risen to 58%.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Lady Howe, Chairman of the Commission said: "Broadcasters have to understand that there is a universal climate of tolerance towards explicit material, particularly if it is gratuitous. If a sexual scene is essential to the storyline then it is clear that less offence will be caused.

"To a significant minority much offence continues to be caused by sex on television as broadcasters strive to make their programmes more realistic. It is important that broadcasters try to balance realism against potential offence. That balance can be helped by sensible scheduling, respecting the Watershed and the provision of suitable warnings".

In a statement issued by the BSC in January, attention was drawn to programmes with erotic strands transmitted by Channel 5 suggesting that they "raise significant issues for public debate..." "In the Commission's view", the statement continued, "the inclusion, for its own sake, of erotic material in a free-to-air television service is a step change in the use of sex on British television and begins to erode the other difference, which research indicates that viewers themselves wish to see, between what is available on open access channels and that which is available through pay services.

"Their inclusion in a mainstream television service runs the risk of encouraging both the amount of such material and the erosion of standards generally. The Commission wishes to remind broadcasters that gratuitous scenes of violent or coercive sex are unacceptable."

In numerous interviews, John Beyer said, "It is a great pity that the Commission does not do far more to set, maintain and improve standards. The BSC has regrettably presided over a worsening situation and indeed, by not upholding so many complaints about sexual explicitness, has, in fact, contributed to the general decline.

"There are a number of factors which explain the apparent lack of public confidence in the Commission and the complaints procedures generally, the main one being that writing in seems to achieve nothing".

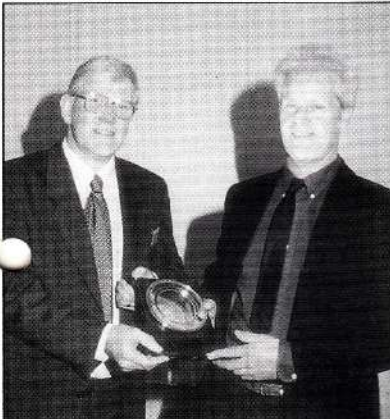
National VALA has always maintained that the number of letters sent to the Commission is a good indication of public concern. "If no-one complains about the programme content transmitted now, we can certainly look forward to a far worse state of affairs in the future," said Mr Beyer.

Complaints forms are available on request from the BSC at 7 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS.

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE

(cont'd from front page)

A Special Award was presented to the BBC2 series 'Land of the Tiger'. Graham said how this series showed the threatening environment in which the Indian tiger manages to survive. The producer of the series, Mike Birkhead, described how changes in attitude brought about by television among Indian people, who for centuries had respected wildlife, were perhaps a bigger threat to the survival of rare species such as the tiger, than other factors.



Graham Stevens with Mike Birkhead, Executive Producer of 'Land of the Tiger'

As a painter himself, Graham said how much he had appreciated the TV series 'Watercolour Challenge' which also received a Special Award from the Association. The programme does so much to promote fine art and shows how much artistic talent there is in this country. The Executive Producer of the series, Mary Durkan, described the difficulties presented by the British weather to artists who necessarily had to work outside for the programme. In thanking the Association, she said how much the team, including Hannah Gordon the presenter, valued our recognition.



Mary Durkan receives the Special Award for 'Watercolour Challenge'

1998 ANNUAL CONVENTION

In his address to the Convention, David Hallam MEP said that the Government had a responsibility to "protect widows and orphans". He referred to children who watch television alone as "tv orphans". "Parents can't be there all the time," he said, "and it is worrying that some children's programmes encourage children to act like jabs and to ridicule figures of authority". Mr Hallam also expressed concern about the soaps and their current tendency to show violent and sexual scenes. He asked why soap operas cannot show positive images of family life instead of showing scenes which depict violence in the home as a normal occurrence.

Dr Susan Edwards, Lecturer-in-Law at Buckingham University, spoke about the "lonely road of isolation when speaking against pornography". Describing research she had completed examining prosecutions in England and Wales, she concluded that the law was ineffective and for this reason lacked enforcement.

"Pornography these days" she said "is about torturing, abusing, maiming and harming other people. Gone are the days when sex shops were out of sight. The sex shops of today are the sitting rooms, lounges and bedrooms of our homes. Satellite TV promulgates pornography and the cardinal right to transmit seems to be unimpeachable. The provisions of the European Directive remain slavish to the concept of free movement of services and freedom of speech. The poorly drafted Directive gives member states the right to enforce their laws but carries the proviso that those laws do not prejudice community obligations".

Author and journalist, Leo McKinstry, began

his address by saying that he has followed our campaign with increasing admiration over the years.

"The Judeo-Christian based morality in our society" he said "has been abandoned in favour of the politically correct non-judgemental creed that 'anything goes' and this is having disastrous consequences for all of us".

Mr McKinstry was highly critical of the statement made by James Ferman, the retiring Director of the British Board of Film Classification, who had called for an end to the ban on hard-core pornography. "Pornography could not be better controlled by liberalising the law, in fact the very opposite would be achieved" said Mr McKinstry who concluded his address with a warm tribute to Mary Whitehouse: "All her warnings about the destruction of morality have proved absolutely correct".

Cassette tapes of the Convention speakers are available from HQ, price £2.50.

No Action on Sado-Masochism

On 10 September Channel 4 screened a 90-minute programme entitled 'Fetishes' which included the depiction of unspeakable sado-masochistic practices showing the infliction of real pain, the total humiliation of the participants and the display and use of masks and other equipment more suited to a torture chamber. The ITC Programme Code states in Section 1.6(i)(g) that "ingenious and unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain or injury, which are capable of easy imitation, should not be included". We wrote to all members of the Independent Television Commission asking them to view the programme in advance so that their statutory requirements to "do all that they can to secure" that the programme complied with the Broadcasting Act and the Programme Code were fulfilled. The programme was only routinely monitored upon transmission and the Chairman of the ITC, Sir Robin Biggam, in a lengthy reply said that "the responsibility for broadcasting programmes lies with the individual licensees...the ITC does not preview programmes nor approve schedules. There are no absolute restrictions on the subjects that programmes may tackle but the ITC requires that the treatment of them complies with ITC Code rules". Sir Robin said that there was no breach of sections 1.6(a) or 1.6(i)(g) above and that "it was a serious documentary about the desire of some New Yorkers to submit to domination".

Since this programme included scenes depicting the infliction of real pain we believed that it was in breach of the Obscene Publications Act. Not until just before Christmas, almost four months after the screening, was a reply received from the Crown Prosecution Service saying "it has been concluded that there is not a realistic prospect of conviction for an offence contrary to Section 2(i) Obscene Publications Act 1959."

OPEN TO SCRUTINY?

The British Board of Film Classification has recently appointed a new Director. Robin Duval, the former Deputy Director of Programmes at the Independent Television Commission, took up the post from the beginning of this year.

In an interview with the Daily Mail we said that Mr Duval had been a key figure in a body which has allowed more violence, more explicit sex and bad language on our TV screens than ever before and that we needed someone in that post who would properly reflect public concerns rather than the interest of the film industry. In a Radio 4 interview on Sunday 15 November, Mr Duval expressed concern about the association of violence and sex together. "His decisions" he said "would have to be clearly defensible" and he would "follow as closely as one can the moving target which is public taste".

National VALA's Director, John Beyer commented "Mr Duval and the ITC have consistently rejected legitimate complaints about issues of taste and decency. Commercial television companies have in recent years won the backing of the ITC to show films such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *Natural Born Killers* and *the Baby of Macon*".

A more open attitude at the BBFC has been apparent since Mr Andreas Whittam-Smith was appointed President last year. A series of public meetings has been held in different parts of the country and a new undertaking has been made that the Board's annual report will be open to scrutiny by a Parliamentary Select Committee.

Mr Whittam Smith recently expressed a genuine desire to listen to those with a concern about standards and he confirmed that an advisory panel of representatives from children's and other organisations had been set up to give their opinions on classification decisions. It has also been announced recently that Lord Taylor of Warwick has been appointed Vice-President of the Board.

Mr Beyer welcomed the new openness: "The Board has been criticised in the past for being secretive but this seems to be changing and not before time. The BBFC could do far more to invite and encourage comment from the public about films. That way they could be much more in tune with the public they say they serve".

The address of the BBFC is 3 Soho Square, London W1V 6HD.

USING THE NET

Here are some e-mail addresses you may find useful

ANGLIA TV:	dutyoffice@angliatv.co.uk
BBC:	info@bbc.co.uk
BORDER TV:	ian@border_tv.com
CARLTON TV:	dutyoffice@carltontv.co.uk
CENTRAL TV:	centraldutyoffice@centraltv.co.uk
CHANNEL 4:	viewer_enqs@channel4.co.uk
CHANNEL 5:	dutyoffice@channel5.co.uk
GMTV:	talk2us@gmtv.co.uk
GRANADA TV:	officers.duty@granadamedia.com
ITC:	publicaffairs@ITC.org.uk
ITN:	viewer.liaison@itn.co.uk
LWT:	dutyoffice.ltc@granadamedia.com
MERIDIAN TV:	dutyoffice@meridiantv.com
TYNE TEES TV:	Tyne.Tees@granadamedia.com

THE DIGITAL AGE

The High Level Group on Audio-visual Policy, chaired by Marcelino Oreja, a member of the European Commission, recently issued a report on the future of broadcasting. It covered such topics as the role of the media for society and democracy in Europe as well as technological developments and their impact on audio-visual content.

The Report included an important section on the legal framework and regulatory bodies which set out the European Commission's attitude to content regulation thus:

"If Europe wishes to remain competitive in an environment where video services come from all over the world, it is necessary to put in place a regulatory framework that fosters competition, innovation and, above all, the rapid development of digital TV services.

"The regulatory framework, in order to evolve without the need for constant adaptation and the consequent lack of legal security, should be more based on principles and consist of less detailed rules. Such principles, however, should include pluralism, the need to provide for quality content, respect for linguistic and cultural diversity and the protection of minors. In addition, clear rules and safeguards are needed to ensure open, non-discriminatory and equal access both for competing providers and for users to digital networks and services. The framework should also be conducive to fostering European, national and local audio-visual production.

National VALA recommends study of this important document. Write to your Member of the European Parliament and ask for a copy of 'The Digital Age: European Audio-visual Policy' published in October 1998. ISBN 92-828-4690-3.

BOOKSHELF

Prices include postage & packing	copies	@	Total
Quite Contrary by Mary Whitehouse (Hardback)	£6.00	£.....
Quite Contrary (Paperback)	£2.00	£.....
Regulation: The Key Issue	£3.00	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 2	£3.00	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 3	£3.50	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 4	£5.00	£.....
Response to EC Green Paper	£2.00	£.....
Monitoring TV and Radio (Revised June '98)	£1.00	£.....
20 Copies of this issue of <i>The Viewer & Listener</i>	£3.00	£.....
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