

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

SPRING 1979

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POLICE BACK NEW VALA REPORT

Joint Central Committee

Police Federation OF ENGLAND AND WALES
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Our Ref: J13/MF

20th February, 1979

Your Ref:

Mrs. Mary Whitehouse,
National Viewers' and Listeners' Association,
Ardleigh,
Colchester,
Essex, CO7 7RH.

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse,

I have read with great interest your very detailed and well thought out report on "LAW - and disorder". It gives me, and I am sure the whole of the Police Service in this country, a great deal of encouragement to know that people such as you and your Association support the rule of law during this very difficult time.

As I have said many times before, it angers me to see policemen portrayed in the way they have been in the past, especially in the programmes "Sweeney" and "Target". It does no good at all for the image of the police to have these programmes showing policemen as thugs and using the sort of language they do.

I will be the first to admit that all members of the police are not angels - as you say in your report, they have the same human frailties as other members of our society. But the British public should be proud that we have the best Police Force in the world and that the police give a service to them which is not bettered by any other public service.

Once again, thank you for your support, and good luck to you for the future.

Yours sincerely,

James Jardine
J.T. JARDINE
Chairman

"What I have said here will be interpreted by some as a call for censorship. It is nothing of the kind. I believe in fearless reporting, and challenging documentary programmes. But I also believe in fairness. I recognise that there can be dishonest policemen and disreputable prison officers, in the same way that there may, I suppose, be dishonest television producers. I am also well aware that television has sometimes played an important role in unmasking the corrupt. And I am certainly aware of excellent programmes that have on occasions been made both about the police and the prison service. What I object to is the serious lack of balance.

"There is, I am afraid, all too often the view, in a society that has become a little neurotic about authority, that a uniformed and disciplined service is, in some respects, fair game; that most criminals are simply the victims of a rather repressive society and that if they choose to make allegations against the police they are more likely to be telling the truth than the police."

Lord Harris: former Labour Minister of State at the Home Office with responsibilities for the Police, Prisons and Broadcasting.

Daily Telegraph, 22nd January 1979

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THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

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IMPASSE

Elsewhere in this publication we reprint an excerpt from Lady Plowden's introduction to the new ITV Handbook "Television and Radio 1979". Speaking about the "continuing concern" with the impact of bad language, sexual themes, violence, particularly upon children, Lady Plowden says that "it has to be remembered that only a third of the households in the United Kingdom contain children and the broadcasters have to serve the two thirds of the audience who are exclusively adult". However, the mathematics behind this calculation can surely only be correct if each of the households with children contained only one of them! And if it is true, as Lady Plowden says, that only programmes suitable for children are shown before 9.00 p.m. then "the continuing concern" to which she refers is being felt very much by adults for themselves!

Be that as it may, to suggest that all those in households without children have no sense of responsibility for the children who are watching, under all kinds of circumstances and for all kinds of reasons, is grossly to underestimate the character of the great majority of viewers. (See "Children's Viewing Habits" — Booklist page 4.)

Discussion, scientific research on the impact of, in particular, televised violence upon the young, has gone on now for so long that it seems that all that can be said has been said. There remains but the one question — do the Broadcasting Authorities intend to change their policy in any way? Give or take a few contra indications (the decision of the BBC not to produce a new series of "TARGET" could be one) there seems little doubt that both the BBC and ITV have dug in for the ratings battle and are making success in that fight their first priority.

So long as the argument is polarised on the question of who is, or is not, responsible for what children see on the television screen, so long will the children be the victims of opposing interests. There are those within the medium of television who talk and behave as though it belongs to them and who dismiss as irrelevant consideration of its possible effects. There are, equally, others — a growing number — whose attitude reflects a sensitive awareness of the responsibilities of their profession.

Since there is, apparently, to be no change of heart by the Authorities, then the problem of children at risk from television must be approached from another angle. It would seem to us that FAMILY VIEWING TIME should be extended until 10 p.m. instead of the present 9 p.m., and National VALA will be pressing this point, amongst others, when the Government's White Paper on Broadcasting is debated by Parliament.

The BBC and ITV could use their immeasurable resources to create understanding not only of the power of television but also of the parents' role and responsibilities in handling television in the home (see Page 3).

This could be the unique contribution to the physical and spiritual health and well being of the child in this INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD.

'Dearest Love'

National VALA members will no doubt have seen in the press that the Director of Public Prosecutions has been asked to consider whether the BBC's decision to show "Dearest Love" (BBC2 2.2.79) violated the Protection of Children Act passed by Parliament last year in response to VALA's ABUSE campaign.

According to the Radio Times this film was about the "sexual initiation" of a 15-year-old boy. It showed the boy being seduced by a prostitute and later by his own mother. The Act makes it clear that it is now illegal to show any indecent photograph or film (film includes any form of video recording), of a child under the age of sixteen.

Furthermore, unlike the Obscene Publications Act, broadcasting is not exempt from this law, and it is made clear that "a body corporate" (an apt description of the BBC) can be charged with such an offence.

The 64,000 dollar question was, of course, whether the boy, Benoit Ferreaux, who played the part of Laurent Chevalier in the film, was under the age of 16 years when the film was made! We, here at headquarters, had an interesting day trying to discover this piece of information. Our enquiries took us (twice!) to France and indeed to the personal 'phone number of the young man in question though there was no reply! Finally, however, we discovered that M. Ferreaux would not have been 16 until the 29th September following the release of the film in June 1971. Clearly then he was at most fifteen, probably only fourteen when the film was made.

The crucial step was taken on the Monday prior to the transmission of the film when we drew the attention of Mr Ian Trethowan, Director General of the BBC, to the likelihood that the screening of "Dearest Love" could violate the Protection of Children Act.

How crucial we did not fully realise until, re-reading the Act, it became clear that it is a defence to show that there had been no knowledge or "any cause to suspect" that the film was indecent!

Importance of Monitoring

The impact of Broadcasting on society is such that very careful scrutiny of the output of both Broadcasting Authorities is necessary. There is widespread concern about the level and cause of social violence throughout the Western world and there is now much reliable research (despite what those with a professional or ideological interest may say) which demonstrates a tangible connection between televised and social violence.

Once this connection is recognised then, quite logically, it must be assumed that all other TV images of human behaviour can stimulate behaviour for better or worse, just as broadcast language profoundly affects the quality of language in everyday life.

The main purpose of monitoring — and in our experience the most successful — is to examine how broadcasting standards measure up to the obligations set out in the Television Act, and in the various Codes of Practice of the BBC and IBA.

National VALA publishes reports from time to time, the most recent being "LAW — and disorder", on various aspects of programme content. Such reports are wholly dependent upon the monitoring activities of our members. Will you help? (Guidance notes available — see Book List.)

Communist looks at Christianity

"We Communists do not play with words. We are realists, and seeing that we are determined to achieve our object we know how to obtain the means. Of our salaries and wages we keep only what is strictly necessary; we give up the rest for propaganda purposes; to this propaganda we also consecrate 'all our free time and part of our holidays'.

"You, however, give only a little time and hardly any money for the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. How can anyone believe in the supreme value of this Gospel if you do not practise it? If you do not spread it, and if you sacrifice neither time nor money for it?

"Believe me, it is we who will win, for we believe in our Communist message and we are ready to sacrifice everything, even our life in order that the social justice shall triumph. But you people are afraid to soil your hands."

From 'Paix et Liberté'—A French Communist Publication.

Indecent Displays (Control) Bill

That the 275 letters sent from Headquarters to the National and Provincial press alerted readers about the Indecent Displays (Control) Bill had great effect is demonstrated by the following extract from Hansard.

HUGH ROSSI speaking:

"The public response to the Bill has been such that it is beyond doubt that deep public concern exists about the present state of affairs. In the past two weeks, since the nature of my Bill became known, I have received representations on behalf of well over 1,000 people, giving me their full support and good wishes in what I am seeking to do. That is not a very large number compared with 55 million, but in terms of correspondence to a Member of Parliament it is very significant. Indeed, my Hon. Friends who are around me this morning know this, because they have been complaining to me during the week that I have generated so much correspondence for them.

"Support has come from every corner of the United Kingdom — from England, from Northern Ireland, from Scotland and from Wales. If Mr. Speaker had been here this morning I would have told him that I have received a great postbag from Cardiff.

"The support has come not only from the churches and parish organisations, from which one would expect to receive representations on a subject of this kind, but also from doctors, teachers, students, welfare workers, cinema managers and newsmen. . . .



Hugh Rossi

"I have received only two letters expressing opposition to the Bill. One was from an acknowledged distributor of pornographic material. The other was written, I understand, on behalf of Gay Liberation. These are the only two letters of fundamental opposition to the Bill that I have received."

International Year of the Child

POINTERS FOR PARENTS ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S VIEWING

- Help your child to understand that there is a process called "choosing the programme". Look up programme guides and discuss with him what might be suitable and he would enjoy, taking into account his age and experience.
- Decide what programmes may be watched and let the child understand that the set is to be switched off when these are finished.
- Do see that the child sits in a comfortable, healthy position to watch (not too close to the set).
- If possible, watch with your child — especially young ones and be alert to signs of fear or disturbance. Encourage the child to talk about what has upset him.
- When the chosen programme(s) finish, switch off. (Unsuitable programmes are much more easily switched off at the beginning than after they have started.)
- After watching, let your child tell you what the programme was about — what he liked and what he disliked. He needs to appreciate that he needn't watch what he doesn't like. Encourage him to practice any skills he may have been taught in the programme.
- Avoid watching TV right up to bedtime. Allow the child some time to unwind.
- Keep a balance between TV watching and time spent on other activities.

IMPACT

"Target, the hard-hitting police series, has been given the bullet.

"The BBC have decided to scrap the series which stars Patrick Mower as tough, brash, knuckle-bruising detective Steve Hackett.

"Target has constantly been attacked by clean-up TV campaigner Mrs. Mary Whitehouse for its violence and foul language.

"And yesterday Patrick Mower's co-star Brendan Price claimed that Mrs. Whitehouse had helped bring the axe down on the series.

"Target was the BBC's home grown answer to Starsky and Hutch, and a rival to ITV's The Professionals."

The Sun, 10.1.79.

The findings of the report 'LAW — AND DISORDER' "are firm and clear, accusing both the BBC and IBA of failing in their public duty by screening programmes unhelpful to the police at a time of rising crime and of social and industrial unrest.

"The report . . . produces painstaking evidence to make a good case against the standard of both programmes involved.

"By detailing evidence such as this the association makes a formidable case against the BBC and IBA . . . Even the argument that by this time all good children are in bed does not in this case hold water . . . In view of this and the general tenor of the report perhaps it's time to pay a little more attention to Mary Whitehouse."

Liverpool Daily Post, 1.2.79.

"The show is called 'Baxter on TV' — my own light-hearted White Paper. It's not satire, quite broad really. But Mrs. Whitehouse should be able to sleep easily this time. When she complained the last time we ran the show through again and realised that what was offensive was the blatant use of certain words. It wasn't dirty, but we have taken the message."

Stanley Baxter,
Glasgow Herald, 23.12.78.

"The big broadcasting institutions have to be broken down and replaced by smaller creative units. Basically, the broadcasting authorities don't like plays on television. They are awkward and expensive. But the play is the last place where individual imagination is at a premium.

"People don't care enough about television. That is why I approve of Mary Whitehouse. I disagree with almost everything she says as she does with almost everything I write. But we need debate and discussion, even if sometimes it does get abusive.

"So good old Mary, more power to her elbow!"

— Playwright Dennis Potter.

WATCH FOR IT!

NATIONAL VALA MEMBERS WILL REMEMBER THE QUESTIONNAIRE SENT LAST YEAR TO M.P.'s REGARDING THEIR ATTITUDE TO ISSUES LIKE BROADCASTING, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, BLASPHEMY AND OBSCENITY.

JOSEPHINE GILL AND ANNE LATHAM (COMING INTO THE OFFICE EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING FOR SEVERAL MONTHS) HAVE DONE A FANTASTIC JOB ANALYSING AND SORTING THE HUNDREDS OF REPLIES WHICH WE RECEIVED. THEY HAVE LINKED THE CONSTITUENCIES OF THESE M.P.'s WITH THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL NEWSPAPER AND AS SOON AS AN ELECTION IS CALLED THE M.P.'s REPLIES WILL BE POSTED TO THE EDITORS.

WE HOPE, IN THIS WAY, TO BRING THESE MORAL ISSUES TO THE VERY FOREFRONT OF THE ELECTION. DO FOLLOW UP THE STORIES WITH APPROPRIATE LETTERS OF SUPPORT — OR OTHERWISE! — OF YOUR CANDIDATES.

"We take a lot of care. But there is a continuing concern with 'bad language', with sexual themes, and with violence, particularly as they may affect children or cause embarrassment to families watching television together. On the portrayal of violence, in particular, we have recently had another report from a working party set up by the IBA, which discussed all aspects of the question exhaustively; and Authority Members, after a first look at it, set aside a full day to consider its implications further.

"Families with children are, of course, remembered; and up to 9.00 p.m. programmes unsuitable for children are not shown. But, progressively, after 9.00 p.m. it is felt that programmes unsuitable for children can be shown, even though it is realised that some children will still be watching. The responsibility for children's viewing cannot be taken wholly by the IBA. It must be shared by parents.

"Yet it has to be remembered that only about a third of the households in the United Kingdom contain children, and the broadcasters have to serve the two-thirds of the audience who are exclusively adult, ranging from the 20-year-olds to the over-60s who depend, particularly in rural districts, on television for their contact with the wide world."

Lady Plowden, Chairman of the IBA.
Foreword to "Television and Radio 1979"

HOPE?

"In its White Paper the Government has recognised the concern felt by the public over the portrayal of violence on television and its effects. Both the BBC and the IBA are undertaking research on this important subject. Nevertheless the effects of television programmes on viewers are of their nature difficult to determine and the Government is in no doubt that the only safe course is for

the broadcasting authorities to assume undesirable effects unless convincing evidence to the contrary emerges. The BBC and the IBA have been asked to review their Codes and guidance to programme producers on the portrayal of violence in the light of the White Paper's comments and keep them under regular review thereafter."

Letter from Home Office 29.12.78.

"RATIONALISATION"—"A psychological term to describe the mind's fabrication of rational arguments to justify conduct of which one is really ashamed."

Dagobert D. Runes (Editor of "The Dictionary of Philosophy")

Appeal Dismissed

"I do not subscribe to the view that the common law offence of blasphemous libel serves no useful purpose in the modern law. On the contrary, I think there is a case for legislation extending it to protect the religious beliefs and feelings of non-Christians. The offence belongs to a group of criminal offences designed to safeguard the internal tranquility of the kingdom. In an increasingly plural society such as that of modern Britain it is necessary not only to respect the differing religious beliefs, feelings, and practices of all but also to protect them from scurrility, vilification, ridicule, and contempt . . .

"I will not lend my voice to a view of the law relating to blasphemous libel which would render it a dead letter, or diminish its efficacy to protect religious feeling from outrage and insult. My criticism of the common law offence of blasphemy is not that it exists but that it is not sufficiently comprehensive."

Lord Scarman: Appeal Judge in the House of Lords.

BOOK LIST

RECENT ADDITIONS

"Law—and Disorder"—National VALA Report 50p
"Mary Whitehouse: The Caped Crusader" 30p
Guidance Notes on Monitoring Radio and TV 10p

BOOKS

"WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SEX?" by MARY WHITEHOUSE (p & p 15p) £1.25p
"MARY WHITEHOUSE" by Max Caulfield (reduced from £4.40) £1.00p

REPORTS

"CHILDREN AND TELEVISION"—PYE Research Report (p & p 18½p) £2.00p
"What Price Annan?"—National VALA Report 60p
"Television Violence and The Adolescent Boy"—Dr William Belson at the British Association 1977 50p
"Children's Viewing Habits"—National VALA Report 50p
"MP's Response to Questionnaire"—National VALA Report 20p

OTHER USEFUL MATERIAL

"Television and Child Development"—TV Action Group leaflet 3p
OPEN LETTER to the Prime Minister from Mary Whitehouse published in THE TIMES 31st May 1978 5p
Parents' Sex Education Charter 1p
"THOUGHT FOR THE DAY" by Mary Whitehouse 40p
RESEARCH CARDS 50 for 25p
TV Station 'phone number cards 3p
Copies of SPRING 1979 Viewer and Listener: 10 for 60p; 20 for £1.00p; 30 for £1.40p

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NATIONAL VALA ENROLMENT FORMS FOR NEW MEMBERS
"Books and Bookmen" May 1978: Mary Whitehouse reviews Enid Wistrich's "I Don't Mind The Sex, It's The Violence".
"Kiddie Porn" a booklet attacking Child Pornography published by Ambassador College Press.
Copies of WINTER 78/9 Viewer and Listener—Ideal for recruiting New Members.

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