

VIEWER AND LISTENER

THE DEBASEMENT OF LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE MOST FOUL" was how *The Times* headed its leader on our latest monitoring report 'The Debasement of Language' which showed that the incidence of swearing on certain TV programmes shown after 9pm has increased over the past two years from the equivalent of 861 annually to some 2,000.

As *The Times* leader went on "The case for reducing bad language on television rests partly upon affection for the English language, which can only be impoverished by all-purpose expletives. 'Tattooed Tears' on Channel Four used obscenities too often to count. In the first quarter of this year, God and Jesus Christ were invoked blasphemously more often than almost any other category of swearword. The Rushdie affair ought to have sensitised the ears of broadcasters to the offence that blasphemy causes to many people today, Muslims, Christians and others. It has clearly not done so. ... The obsession of television programme makers with obscenity now seems jejune, as if proving some waning verbal virility. In awarding the new television franchises, the ITC might note those bidders whose respect for viewers includes codes of practice on when swearwords are appropriate, and when not."

It wasn't only *The Times* which showed interest in the report and sympathy for our concern. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* carried leaders, and news of the publication of the report appeared in all national and many provincial papers. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Derek Worlock and Archbishop David Sheppard of Liverpool and Archbishop John Aloysius Ward of Cardiff have all written to express their concern and support for our initiative. Copies of the report were sent also to the Prime Minister and to the Home Secretary. It is important that NVALA members order a copy from headquarters to send to their own MPs. [See Bookshelf]

Launching the report 'The Debasement of Language' which had covered late night films shown on BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4 between March 1989 and March 1991 Mary Whitehouse said: "The incidence of blasphemous, obscene and scurrilous language has more than doubled in the two years of this monitoring project". She went on "The purpose of this research into the incidence of bad language on television has been to discover what, if any, effect the undertakings given by the Broadcasting Authorities have had upon the quality of programme standards. Mr. Duke Hussey, Chairman of the BBC said (24.2.88) that he had given 'the Home Secretary an undertaking that the BBC will take firm steps to eradicate unnecessary and gratuitous violence, sex and bad language from our programmes.' In its Annual Report (February 1991) the ITC stated, as had earlier reports, that 'Many people are offended, some of them deeply, by the use of bad language, including expletives with a religious connotation. It is therefore important ... to avoid any gratuitous use of language likely to offend.'

"The Broadcasting Act 1990 states that nothing 'likely to offend against good taste and decency, or to offend public feeling' should be transmitted. However, in spite of the legal constraints under which broadcasting now operates, the fact is that the incidence of bad language is increasing month by month. National VALA will continue its monitoring in the hope that in the months ahead a marked improvement will be seen.

"It is all too obvious that promises and paper commitments by both authorities have had no effect whatever upon programme makers, leading us to believe that there is either a lack of will or an impotence deplorable in people who carry so much responsibility. We trust that this report will provide the evidence upon which effective action can be taken."

'A-Z OF CENSORSHIP' Channel 4 - 20th April

'O' for Obscenity by Mary Whitehouse

The police acknowledge that there is a link between certain kinds of pornography and sex crimes. Tragically, the obscenity law in this country is so vague and ineffective that the police find it increasingly difficult to bring successful prosecutions against pornography and permissive case law multiplies. As long ago as 1979, the Williams Committee examining the work of the law on obscenity concluded that "The law in these matters is a mess". And so it is.

In order to improve the law just two changes need to be made. The crucial sentence speaks of a "tendency to deprave and corrupt those who are likely to see" the offending material. But who can prove "a tendency" - and who can decide who is "likely to see" the material - when the child may or may not take a peep at what Dad keeps hidden under his pillow!

What is needed is a statutory definition of obscenity that will leave judges and juries in no doubt as to the nature of the offence. I share the view of Gerald Howarth, MP, who defined obscenity as material "grossly offensive to a reasonable person"; the concept of a reasonable person is well established in British law.

And in my view "soft" pornography should not be excluded, since addiction to such material can lead

to a demand for hard core publications, which, in turn, can lead to an interest in and involvement with, child pornography.

Recent moves to bring Broadcasting under the Obscene Publications Act are a step in the right direction. But what good will that do when the Act itself is so ineffective? Clearly the broadcasters - or some of them - are not worried by the possibility of prosecution under the present law or they would not have transmitted some of the films we are now seeing in Channel 4's BANNED season

"Decisive Action" - see inside
"BANNED" - or should have been!
- see back page

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PREPARING FOR A GENERAL ELECTION

National VALA, during the course of its history, has played a key role in getting a number of pieces of legislation on to the statute book. I refer to the Indecent Displays Act (1981), The Protection Of Children Act (1978) and the Video Recordings Act (1984).

The fact that our ongoing campaign to bring broadcasting under the Obscene Publications Act finally succeeded, with the passing of the Broadcasting Act at the end of last year, is a tribute not only to those who fought so hard and consistently for that amendment, but also to the present government from which, through the good offices of both Mrs Thatcher and Douglas Hurd, we received so much support.

However, there remains the most important of all our campaigns, namely to make effective the present Obscene Publications Act. There can be no doubt that it has been the ineffectiveness of this legislation which has kept open the door for the flood of pornography which has so corrupted and seduced our culture.

Let us make no mistake – the battle for the future quality of our common life, not least as it affects the children, will never be won until that law properly reflects public dissatisfaction with it.

Quite how serious the situation is, as regards television, has been highlighted by the transmission by Channel 4, at 9.50 in the evening, of the film 'Hotel New Hampshire' with its appalling gang rape of a young girl, its violence and its endless obscenity.

Which brings me to the forthcoming general election. It is vital that, individually and collectively, we make the matter of an effective obscenity law an issue not only for each political party but also for every election candidate.

The difficulty we are told, in and out of season, year in and year out, is that of constructing an effective law. Of course it's difficult, but, in the end, it is the will that is lacking and arguably, the pressure brought by those benefiting from the lucrative pornography industry.

Without being cynical, the amount of thought, research and resources, which is now being expended over the poll tax – something that touches our pockets – is likely to have a profound effect upon the outcome of the next election. Ladies and Gentlemen, if one fraction of that kind of effort and determination were poured into ensuring that effective obscenity law sits on the statute book, then there can be no doubt it would do so! And we should all appeal to the Home Secretary to make such legislation his priority.

Mary Whitehouse

DECISIVE ACTION

Following the screening of 'Sex and the Censors' and 'W.R. Mysteries of the Organism', two of the Channel Four programmes shown in the 'BANNED' series, NVALA sent videos of the programmes to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Allan Green QC. We asked him to consider whether Channel Four and the Independent Television Commission should be prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act. Our members will be aware that broadcasting, formerly exempt, was brought under that Act last November after many years of campaigning by NVALA. The outcome of this initiative is of the utmost significance and the future quality of television may well depend upon it.

CONVENTION

In his speech, the Home Secretary, The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, spoke at some length about the role of the Broadcasting Standards Council but then went on "I must stress that the responsibilities of the broadcasters in respect of taste and decency have not been diminished in any way by its establishment. It was certainly not the Government's intention that the Council should relieve the broadcasters of that responsibility. They and the BSC should be able to work together with the common aim of defining and sustaining acceptable standards, but the broadcasters are in the front line of public protection. This protection relies in part on the programme codes and in part on the daily editorial decisions of the programme makers and controllers.

This leads me to the action the Government has taken to remove an anomaly which has existed for a number of years. We used the opportunity provided by the Broadcasting Bill to bring to an end the broadcasters' exemption from obscenity legislation. We felt it was inappropriate to allow the situation to continue whereby a person who published obscene material would be subject to the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, whilst one who included similar material in a broadcast programme would not. I am grateful for your Association's support of the Government's decision, Madam President.

But we have not restricted our work on standards to domestic broadcasting. I spoke earlier about the development of new technologies. These have allowed programmes to cross national boundaries on a large scale and over great distances. It was concern about material contained in programmes broadcast to the UK from abroad which led to our firm belief that there was a need for international agreements on standards. In order to achieve this end we worked hard to secure agreement on two major instruments - the European Community Broadcasting Directive and the Council of Europe Convention on Transfrontier Television. These set out minimum standards for broadcasting throughout Europe on matters such as taste and decency. Any indication that services broadcast to the UK from abroad are including scenes of excessive violence or pornography will enable us to take action under either of these instruments. Both include powers to suspend the re-transmission of unacceptable programme services. In practical terms this means that we can 'pull the plug' on such services and prevent

ION '91: ANOTHER SUCCESS

"CHALLENGE ANNEKA"



The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker MP
The Home Secretary

them from being re-transmitted on cable networks in this country.

We have also included powers in the Broadcasting Act to help us deal with this problem. I may make an Order proscribing a foreign satellite service if it is brought to my attention by either the Independent Television Commission or the Radio Authority that that service is unacceptable. To back this up we have introduced an offence of supporting such a proscribed service, which will carry a maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment on indictment. I hope these measures demonstrate the Government's commitment to preserving standards of taste and decency in all programmes reaching this country."

Introducing the presentation of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association Annual Award, Mary Whitehouse said that she thought that "the Anneka Rice programme on Romania was one of the most moving, wonderful programmes I have ever seen. We decided that we would this year give our Award to Mr. Tom Gutteridge who is the Managing Director of Mentorn Films who made the programme". She went on to say how "very grateful and honoured we are to have Princess Helen of Romania to be here to present the award".

In her address to the Convention Princess Helen told of how she "went to Romania for the first time last Easter and as you could imagine it was a very traumatic and emotional time for me, as it was the first time I had ever been there, as my father was forced to abdicate at the end of 1947, and we have all lived in exile since that time." She went on "I would like to

thank everybody very sincerely first from myself and also for my family for all that everybody in Britain has done for my country. It means a tremendous lot to me and moves me very deeply that everyone has taken such a lot of care for that poor upset country, That again brings me to the programme which you (Tom Gutteridge) made with Anneka Rice in helping Romania by refurbishing this orphanage. Those children, thank God, have now got a better standard of living and will live in comparative comfort compared to a lot of the others, and it means so much to me that people have gone out there and worked very hard to bring some happiness to these children. And on that note I would like to present this to you and thank you again."

In his response Tom Gutteridge thanked us all for our Award which he said "is much more attractive than a BAFTA Award! It is a great honour for us all and in particular for the production team who made the programme. I think it proves that entertainment programmes can actually achieve something as well as simply being sources of entertainment and it proves that under certain circumstances the power of television can be harnessed for the common good." Everyone agreed and applauded warmly.

Anneka Rice, who was unable to be there in person, recorded a message on video. She said "This recognition by your Association is a great honour for all the production team. The programme was undoubtedly our greatest challenge of the series and in a very real way affected all our lives. Thank you all very much."



Mrs Diana Widdows presents Princess Helen of Romania with a basket of flowers.

PROFESSOR COURT JETS IN FROM USA

I want to say a few words about a book we have just published "Kinsey, Sex and Fraud - The Indoctrination of a People". I got into this work some eight years ago with the co-author, Judith Reisman. She is a communications expert who has a passionate love of children and has the sort of concerns that Mary Whitehouse has expressed in this country over the years. We went back to the early documents that Kinsey produced and found some astonishing findings in the reports of 1948 and 1953.

We were assisted, thirdly, by a medical colleague, Dr Gordon Muir, who has given us some special insights into the consequences of the permissive society in terms of sexually transmitted diseases. So the book has a number of themes to it.

In Kinsey's reports there was a clear effort to undermine the concept of heterosexuality as normal and marriage as normal and replace it by a whole lot of other values. We have developed that theme very fully. We have, in particular, shown that there was

some shocking and scandalous research carried out live on young children - some 317 boys going down as young as four months of age - being stimulated by researchers to check out their sexual responses. The way these findings are reported in the original volumes are, even today, shocking but did not really seem to come to the light of day because the mass media at the time glossed over that material.

What in effect we have done is to take the numerous issues that many of you are concerned about - like pornography and the explicit sexual media - and we note that Hugh Hefner said "But for Kinsey, Playboy would never have been published". Our book is a scientific book aimed at the scientific community asking for a scientific response and for a Government response and for the opening up of the files of the Kinsey Institute - even at this late date - to discover what happened in that exploitation of children.

One major US commentator calls the book "social dynamite".

Orders for this book should be sent with remittance of £14.95 to Nova Distribution Ltd, 29 Milber Industrial Estate, NEWTON ABBOT, Devon, TQ12 4SG.

CHILDREN'S VIEWING - LATEST SHOCK SURVEY

by Birmingham Sunday Mercury 12th May 1991

Children are watching too much television and it's stunting their development. It's making them dull and unimaginative and blighting their chances of passing crucial exams that will affect the rest of their lives.

That's the view of educational experts and a Government Minister who studied the results of a special *Sunday Mercury* survey into the viewing habits of youngsters in the Midlands. Our survey showed that:

- One in ten children are watching more than 40 hours of television a week;
- Six out of ten spend MORE time in front of the set than they do in front of the teacher at school;
- For most families, the 9pm watershed, designed to protect children from sex and violence, is simply IGNORED.

Over half of 9-11 year olds stay up watching TV after 9 o'clock and one in ten stay up until after 11.30pm.

Over forty per cent of 15-17 year olds were up after 11pm because one of their favourite programmes is 'Prisoner Cell Block H' which can be screened as late as midnight.

Our survey showed their favourite programmes are the Australian soaps 'Home & Away' and 'Neighbours'. They also like sit-coms like 'The Upper Hand' and 'Birds of a Feather'.

Nine out of ten parents had NO RULES about how late children should stay up to watch TV.

Parents in our survey believe their children watch between 16 and 45 hours a week.

No parent thought their child watched more than 45 hours. Yet almost eight per cent of children ADMITTED they watched MORE than that.

The difference is explained either because parents just don't realise how much TV their children watch or because the children have TVs in their bedrooms and watch AFTER bedtime.

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT: Our survey, carried out between 29th April and 3rd May, involved 664 children aged between 5 and 17, split equally between boys and girls.

Most questionnaires were filled in by youngsters in four schools in Birmingham, the Black Country and Warwickshire.

We also questioned 170 parents who, between them, had 219 children.

The work was carried out by the *Sunday Mercury's* Market Research Department.

"BANNED" - OR SHOULD HAVE BEEN!

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, 24th April, about the series 'BANNED', William Oddie said: "BANNED, in fact, has been nothing less than the hijacking of a major TV channel for the purpose of an ideologically motivated exercise in mass indoctrination. This makes the whole operation a sustained and massive hypocrisy of the most nauseating kind.

"I should be surprised if it is not worse than that. I cannot be the only one to wonder how seriously the law has been flouted over the last few weeks, as films and programmes banned here have succeeded each other, many surely contravening the terms of the Broadcasting Act and the Obscene Publications Act.

"One programme in the series 'Sex and the Censors', seemed almost to be inviting prosecution: a compendium of indecent passages cut by the British Board of Film Classifica-

tion from films destined for the cinema; passages that are too indecent, even for the very permissive X-rated category.

"The motivation of the series is clear. As the decks are being cleared for the framing of effective legislation to control broadcasting, this has been the last ditch stand of the self-selected elite who want to do exactly as they like. It will surely backfire on them: BANNED has taken Channel 4 well beyond the pale."

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