

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

OCTOBER 1977

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OPEN LETTER TO Mr TRETHOWAN

Dear Mr. Trethowan,

Our good wishes for your term of office as Director General of the BBC come with the utmost sincerity. You must be proud, as we are, of the very considerable contribution to art, music, and literature which the Corporation makes, as well as of the stimulation it offers to the consideration of national, international and social affairs.

Nevertheless, because we feel sure you must share our anxiety about the increasing problems of social and political violence, we would wish to put this question to you.

Will you, as a matter of priority, consider how best to break through the harsh crust of intellectual compromise and professional intransigence which has consistently inhibited any interpretation, in programme terms, of the long standing, world wide, common sense acceptance of the link

between social and televised violence?

There is a widespread belief amongst viewers, that the unwillingness of the Broadcasting Authorities to implement the findings of successive reports claiming a causal link between television and social violence, springs from a cynical determination to maximise audiences irrespective of the social consequences of violence. That the Authorities also freely quote, in justification, the now discredited American Surgeon-General's Report does nothing to correct this impression.

Times are now too urgent, public feeling too volatile, and the reputation of the Broadcasting Authorities too deeply involved, for this public anxiety, and in particular the findings of Dr. Belson's recent report to be acknowledged by no more than assurances that "guidance lines" will be re-



Mr. Ian Trethowan

viewed. Such "guidance" has been admirably presented in the various long standing "Codes of Practice". It is a sad fact of television life that there is, not infrequently, a very wide gap between what is advised and what is practiced.

It would be inappropriate for me to say that this Association would be grateful for such leadership from you. This is a matter which is of concern to the whole of our society.

Yours sincerely,
Mary Whitehouse
Honorary General Secretary,
National Viewers & Listeners
Association

VIOLENCE ON T.V.

Mr. Ian Trethowan's term of office opens with a major challenge, namely that presented by Dr. Belson's research into "Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy". The Report sits firmly, also, on the desk of the IBA.

What will happen to it? Will it gather dust like all the previous reports on this issue? Or will it usher in a new era of public responsibility within broadcasting.

One's hopes are high, but one's head is tempted to cynicism! Why? Look at earlier "Reports".

- "Violence ought not to be presented in ways which might glorify it, or portray it as a proper solution to interpersonal conflicts."
BBC 1972—Portrayal of Violence in Television Programmes

- "There is no alternative to a continuing assumption that the portrayal of violence may have harmful effects".
IBA 1973—The Portrayal of Violence on Television

- "One hundred and forty-six articles in behavioural science journals, representing 50 studies involving 10,000 children and adolescents from every conceivable background, all showed that violence produces increased aggressive behaviour in the young and that immediate remedial action in terms of television programming is warranted. Four major issues are covered: effects on learning, emotional effects, the question of catharsis and effects an aggressive behaviour."
The Journal of the American Medical Association 1975

- "We believe that, while increased exploitation and depiction of violence in the media is only one of the many social factors contributing to crime, it is the largest single variable most amenable to rectification."

"Royal Commission on Violence—the Communications Industry" Ottawa 1976

- "Serious violence is increased by long term exposure to: plays or films in which close personal relationships are a major theme and which feature verbal or physical violence; programmes in which violence seems just thrown in for its own sake or is not necessary to the plot; programmes featuring fictional violence of a realistic kind; programmes in which the violence is presented as being in a good cause; Westerns of the violent kind."

*"Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy"—
Dr. William Belson — 1977*

This Report recommends that

1. Steps should be taken as soon as possible for a major cut back in the total amount of violence being presented on television.
2. A programme of research should be set up specifically to challenge, tighten up and to extend the guideline system. The nature of the required research is indicated in the report.
3. A regular monitoring should be established to provide periodic analyses of the amount and the kind of violence that is being presented through television."

BELSON REPORT
Available from National VALA — 50p

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

NATIONAL
VALA Ardleigh
Colchester Essex CO7 7RH
Telephone: 0206 230 123

An unusual summer

A personal message from the Hon. Gen. Secretary

What has National VALA been doing during the last three or four months? This is the question that the BBC and ITV hierarchy must have been asking — where are the official letters from the Association detailing the reactions to the various programmes? To Yorkshire TV's "Man and Woman" sex education programmes; to the repeat, during 'Festival '77' of some of the programmes, for example "All my Loving" (with its obscene sequence involving the late Jimmy Hendrix) and the highly controversial "Double Dare"; to the sometimes subtle (Don Cupitt's "Who was Jesus?") and the rather arrogant (Magnus Magnusson's "The Archaeology of the Bible") undercutting of the traditional Christian faith?

A good question, with a simple answer! Your General Secretary has been very occupied, first with the Annan Report and NVALA's recommendations on this Report to the Home Secretary; with the publication of "What-ever Happened to Sex?"; with various international conferences; with the battle against pornography and last, but by no means least, with the Blasphemy action against "Gay News".

Although this last was a private prosecution, the significance of it for our campaign for broadcasting standards will not be lost upon our members — nor, one imagines, upon the broadcasting authorities. The successful outcome of this case should be seen therefore, as very relevant to our main concern. So, also, of course, should our involvement with pornography. We must always remember that the media is indivisible. As long as offensive material is freely displayed on book-stalls, so long will the BBC and ITV be able to claim, as they do, that broadcasting merely "reflects the world in which we live".

Not only your General Secretary but our office personnel, full and part time, have been "stretched" to capacity this spring and summer!

Why am I writing to you in this way? Because at such times — more than most — one's thoughts turn to our members. Have they been saying "Oh, Mary is sure to be doing something about THAT!" and leaving it at that? But involvement — personal commitment — is what National VALA is all about. It is YOUR letters, YOUR phone calls, YOUR local activities — YOUR battles in the local press which give our organisation its substance.

In other words, if we at headquarters find ourselves so heavily involved that the usual processes of communication with the Broadcasting Authorities etc. become inhibited, we here must have the assurance that they are left in no doubt about the continuing vigour of the work. The strength of YOUR commitment is the strength of National VALA.

01 580 4468
Broadcasts London Telex
Telex 265781

BROADCASTING HOUSE

LONDON W1A 1AA

12th July 1977

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse,

Thank you for your letter of 28th June, already acknowledged, in which you conveyed congratulations on our Jubilee coverage from the London and South-East Convention of National V.A.L.A. I can assure you that they are very much appreciated here. Your members may like to know that they are not alone in paying special praise to the camera work in Saint Paul's Cathedral.

It was good of you to give me the opportunity of reading your own address to the Convention and to draw my attention to the warmth and generosity of your reference to our coverage on Jubilee Day.

Yours sincerely
Charles Curran

(Charles Curran)
Director-General

Mrs. M. Whitehouse,
Ardleigh,
Colchester,
Essex.
CO7 7RH

To Sir Charles Curran, retiring as Director of the BBC, we send our very best wishes.

POWER OF THE PEN

Over 600 press cuttings covering the Blasphemy trial came into Head Office. And what story did they tell?

First of all of course, there was the straightforward reporting of the events of the trial. But *immediately* the trial was over the homosexual/humanist/intellectual lobby launched itself into action, concentrating primarily upon the correspondence column of The Times, but using every national and provincial paper. Quite a spectacle!

The strategy of the lobby became abundantly clear — and immediately. It was to smother the issue of blasphemy by constant repetition of the theme that the real purpose of the trial had been to persecute a minority — namely the homosexuals. It was sad to see some churchmen, practically all of whom had not read the poem, jumping on this band-waggon. Even sadder to notice the silence of others.

However, it was most encouraging to see the way in which some of our people jumped to the counter attack. People like Mr. Harold Howell, of Whitborne, Dorset, who answered a critical editorial in the Methodist Recorder by quoting whole chunks of the last Viewer & Listener. (Most effective, Mr. Howell, and thank you!)

But there is no doubt that the humanist lobby in particular is master of the art of commanding attention through phone-in programmes as well as the press. Its members are dedicated to their cause — even obsessive — and lose no chance of making propaganda.

Supporters of our cause, many of whom are deeply involved in all sorts of activities are, on the whole, much slower off the mark. This is a skill we need to master!

(See letter, p. 4.)

JUBILEE YOUTH CHALLENGE

"All Change for Christ"

DAY CONGRESS

Friends Meeting House, Euston Road

26th November

Details from:

Order of Christian Unity, 39 Victoria Street, London, S.W.1

"A Crime Against Innocents"

This was how Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Leader of the Opposition, described the production of child pornography in her letter to the Home Secretary, Mr. Merlyn Rees, in which she called for urgent Government action.

The support of Mrs. Thatcher is enormously encouraging in our campaign to get immediate legislation which will make illegal:

1. The use of children in any kind of pornographic material;
2. The publication and distribution of such material.

We would also wish for legal restraints to be established which would prevent parents/guardians offering their children for such purposes.

At the time of going to press it has not been possible to arrange a meeting with the Home Secretary or his Minister of State. It was felt that the suggestion that Mary Whitehouse should meet a senior civil servant at the Home Office was not treating the matter with sufficient urgency.

Please support our initiative in this matter by letters to Members of Parliament, local papers, 'phone-ins, etc. And watch the newspapers for developments!

If our readers feel that they are constantly reminded of the need to "get involved", the following quotation from the British Humanist Association's latest Annual Report reinforces the necessity.

"During the year the BHA has been represented at the United Nations Association Annual Conference, the NCCL, has had representatives on the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, the Standing Conference for the Advancement of Counselling and individual members have represented a Humanist point of view on a plethora of other bodies both national and local.

The cumulative effect of having Humanist representation in such a network of organisations should never be under-estimated.

It is interesting to record that a recent survey amongst members of the Edinburgh Humanist Group showed that 25 of their members were between them members of 30 different organisations!"

N.B. The BHA has a current membership of 1,886! (Editor)

Home Secretary Intransigent

NO LEGAL CONTROLS OVER BROADCASTING

The Home Secretary Mr. Merlyn Rees, in a letter sent to the Hon. Gen. Secretary just before Parliament rose for its recess, has categorically refused to include Broadcasting in his remit to the newly established Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship.

His reason?—because the Annan Committee has just reported on the future of broadcasting.

It is interesting to note that the Home Secretary completely avoids discussing the question of how the recommended Open Broadcasting Authority should be controlled. Annan envisages this as a publishing channel, independent of both IBA and BBC. In his letter to the Secretary of NVALA the Home Secretary says "separate arrangements apply to broadcast matter inasmuch as the broadcasting authorities have duties and obligations as to matters of public taste" and justifies the continued

exclusion of broadcasting from the Obscenity Laws on these grounds.

So what must be assumed from this intransigent attitude? Either, that the Home Secretary is prepared to allow any such additional channel to have complete licence—as would inevitably be the case if the necessary law were not implemented—or does he not intend to introduce an OBA?

We believe that the failure to deal with this aspect of such a proposed new Authority constitutes a serious weakness in the Annan Report. Under pressure to say precisely *how* the Open Broadcasting Authority would be controlled, Mr. Philip Whitehead MP at the Royal Television Society Symposium in June finally admitted that the Obscene Publications Act would have to be amended to include broadcasting if the OBA came into being. Since Home Office officials were present at the RTS conference it must

THE VOICE OF YOUTH . . .

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse,

During the last year NVALA has been fighting some cases against those who want to discredit Christ and so Christians. It seems a tragedy to me when there is very little support from Christians. The reason, as I see it, is ignorance and apathy, which creates scepticism.

I would like to give the example of my Church, which a few years ago, was sceptical about supporting NVALA, but which has in the last year begun prayerful support and much conversation about NVALA's action. This makes me feel that it is the duty of Christian VALA members to challenge their fellowships about matters brought up by NVALA.

Yours faithfully,
Hugh Sturdy,
WILTSHIRE.

Extracts from letter from a Comprehensive School in Gloucestershire.

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse,

We are writing to you because we think you are the only lady who is trying to help clean up all the 'gutter filth' that young people are subjected to these days.

We have men accosting us almost at the school gates, since we have been 12 we are asked "Are you on the game?" or "Are you in business?"

We blame all the horrible films and magazines that make money for men and the complacency of women's organisations such as 'Mothers' Unions' and church assemblies. Why is it allowed all this filth is against womanhood and "Bully for the boys" and men?

We are two 15 and one 16 and when we leave school have promised to be journalists and fight these brutes like militant suffragettes. Thank you Mrs. Whitehouse. Keep up the good work.

From a young supporter.

"As a result of coming to this meeting I feel I should tythe to VALA and I will send £1.00 every week."

be assumed that full report of the discussions was made to the Home Secretary.

So—is the present Government going to preside over the establishment of a new broadcasting channel upon which no limits will be set? Or—are we to presume that it has no intention of creating an Open Broadcasting Authority?

PLEASE RAISE THIS ISSUE WITH YOUR MP.

HAVE YOU READ IT YET?

"I'm trying to get it into every possible public library" writes one of our members. Are you? If not, please will you?

Information coming into Headquarters indicate that long queues exist for the book in many libraries. Please encourage them to order further copies.

We are, of course, talking about Mary Whitehouse's new book "Whatever Happened to Sex?" The bitter attacks by the humanist and homosexual lobbies indicate how important they believe this book to be, while international interest in the possibilities of getting it published abroad is growing. These two reviews show why.

READ IT

"Mrs. Whitehouse's book is a magnificent achievement. It is evident from her account how much she has suffered, in opposing the 'pornography explosion'. But she has persisted, with her dogged defence of the 'ordinary good home', as D. W. Winnicott called it, and of the Christian virtues and values upon which our civilisation is based. But out of the suffering she has distilled a very powerful understanding of the problem of the perversion of sex in our time. She has done her homework and has presented her case with intelligence, wit and a deeply moving power.

Her most important concern is with children. She fears that we are doing untold damage to children, by allowing them to be exposed to the brutal explicitness of pornography (there is no way to defend children if adults indulge in a barbarous culture) and to the cruel dehumanisations of "progressive" sex education. . . .

Her book is a must for every headmaster and teacher, and for all who care about culture and values."

David Holbrook—*The Irish Press*

Age Nielsen
Kvindekommissær
Langevej 11
2800 København 8

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse.

I saw in Danish T.V. some days ago that you had victory in a blasphemy-case, and therewith brought a § into the British criminal law, which has not been in use for many years, to live again.

I want to congratulate you and all your fighters of my full heart.

Thank you also for the way you treated Jens Jørgen Thorsen. We could not in our country get victory in a blasphemy case against him, indeed we need it very much. Jesus said: "Ye are the salt of the earth", and we pray that the salt from you must reach also Denmark and help us to go on in the fight.

Thank you, yours sincerely

Age Nielsen
Age Nielsen.

Published by National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, Ardleigh, Colchester, Essex. Printed by CPC Ltd., Christchurch, Dorset.

The press has been full of notices by patronising pundits, each one, in a speciously detached manner, regarding her book as an expression, if not of prurience, at least of frustrated gentility.

Mrs. Whitehouse's concern for the whole nature of our society is timely. She does not want to see the world where men and women are regarded solely as part of the material process; the value of life exhausted in the gratification of sexual appetites; self-centred and lacking reference to values outside ourselves. She sounds a warning note that our feet are already well advanced upon that path. Her call is not for the creation of a heavy machinery of puritanical restrictions—as her enemies assume—but for an awareness of our situation and our subsequent education into responsibility. It is a matter of degree, like everything else. It is a pity the emotionalism of the libertarians will not allow them to see that."

Dr. Edward Norman, Dean of Peterhouse, "Books: Bookmen" Sept. 1977.

Bargain Book Offer!

Single copies of Max Caulfield's biography "Mary Whitehouse" are now available from headquarters for £1.00 post free — and autographed! Published to sell at £4.50!

These remainders offer a unique opportunity to obtain this immensely readable book — an ideal Christmas present!

Quantities may be obtained at 40p/copy for resale at own price — a good opportunity for fund raising at your church or your organisations.

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