

# LAW — and disorder



A Report on the depiction of  
police officers in the television  
programmes 'TARGET' (BBC 1)  
and 'THE SWEENEY' (ITV)  
Autumn 1978

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"THE EVIDENCE IS FAIRLY UNANIMOUS THAT AGGRESSIVE ACTS NEW TO THE SUBJECT'S REPERTOIRE OF RESPONSES, AS WELL AS ESTABLISHED ACTS, CAN BE EVOKED BY THE VIEWING OF VIOLENT SCENES PORTRAYED ON TELEVISION".

EYSENCK & DIAS.

'SEX, VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA' 1978.

CRIME ROSE BY 16 PER CENT IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1977 WHILE THE 42 POLICE FORCES OUTSIDE THE METROPOLITAN AREA REMAINED 6 PER CENT BELOW FULL STRENGTH, ACCORDING TO THE MOST RECENT REPORT OF SIR COLIN WOODS, CHIEF INSPECTOR OF CONSTABULARY.

THE REPORT DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE CONTINUING DIFFICULTIES OF PUBLIC ORDER POLICING, AND GIVES A WARNING THAT SERIOUS CRIME IS SPREADING FROM URBAN CONURBATION TO SEMI-RURAL AREAS. IT WAS A CAUSE FOR SERIOUS CONCERN.



'THE SWEENEY' (ITV) 'TARGET' (BBC1) AUTUMN 1978

THIS PIECE OF RESEARCH HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT BY NATIONAL VALA AT A TIME OF RISING VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT CRIME; WHEN AN UNDERMANNED POLICE FORCE IS WORKING OFTEN UNDER CONDITIONS OF VERY CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL RISK, AND IN A CLIMATE SOURED BY ANTI-POLICE PROPOGANDA OF A POLITICAL NATURE.

National VALA appreciates that the job the police and Special Branch officers, in particular, have to perform will bring them into constant contact with much that is vicious, dirty and sordid. However, in the name of 'reality' viewers are subjected to the foulest language and the most vicious of violence as well as the endless sexual exploits of the main characters in these programmes.

We realise that policemen are perfectly capable, upon occasion, of using bad language, losing their tempers, and behaving in a manner which is less than responsible. We do not accept that police officers, as a matter of course, are foul mouthed, sadistically violent and promiscuous.

We fully accept that programmes which show confrontation between criminals and the police will, upon occasion, contain violence. We do not accept that such violence has to be sadistic, nor that programmes should demonstrate that criminals are only apprehended by violent means.

We believe that the programmes 'The Sweeney' and 'Target' have helped to undermine public confidence in the police at a time of considerable social and political stress. And that this is indefensible.

FURTHERMORE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THESE PROGRAMMES HAVE BEEN SOLD ABROAD - IN THE CASE OF 'THE SWEENEY' ALREADY "WORLDWIDE" (THAMES TV spokesman). ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT OUR CONTENTION IS CORRECT THAT THESE PROGRAMMES ARE DAMAGING TO THE IMAGE OF THE POLICE FORCE IN THIS COUNTRY, HOW DAMAGING THEY MUST ALSO BE TO THE IMAGE OF BRITAIN ABROAD.



"VIOLENCE OUGHT NOT TO BE PRESENTED IN WAYS WHICH MIGHT GLORIFY IT, OR PORTRAY IT AS A PROPER SOLUTION TO INTER-PERSONAL 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.

"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

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THE BROADCASTING AUTHORITIES have a duty to serve the public interest. The upholding of police morale and public confidence in the Police Force should be, in the Association's view, of paramount importance to both the BBC and the IBA. This is not to say that police officers should be portrayed as more than human, it is to say that they should not be portrayed as so immoral a profession as to breed contempt amongst the public as a whole, or, it should also be said, as to embarrass, or disquiet, the families of serving officers, particularly the young wives.

The persistent theme of these two programmes, often re-inforced by good acting and production and brilliant camera work, has been that the end always justifies the means, and that those whose job it is to uphold law and order are as corrupt as those who defy it. Such a theme is untrue



and mischievous. Its effect is destructive of public trust and security.

The obscene and blasphemous language used in these two programmes came as much from the police as from the criminals; the often sadistic violence was practised as much by the police as by the criminals; promiscuity was, in fact, much more a characteristic of the police than of the criminals. In other words, there was little, if anything, to chose between them.

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The whole presentation of these programmes was, invariably, larger than life. Time and again 'The Sweeney' and 'Target' showed, as though it were normal police practice, the kind of violence which, in actuality, occurs in a very small number of cases and with a minute number of criminals and police officers.

IN EVERY DAY LIFE POLICE OFFICERS DO NOT NORMALLY CARRY WEAPONS. WE UNDERSTAND FROM SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS THAT ROBBERIES WHICH INVOLVE ARMED VIOLENCE ARE THE ONLY ONES IN WHICH VIOLENCE IS USED EITHER BY OR AGAINST THE POLICE. YET THE GUN IS USED IN THESE PROGRAMMES WITH FAR GREATER FREQUENCY THEN AUTHENTICITY WOULD DEMAND.

The standard of driving of the police officers in this series would never be tolerated in real life since it would inevitably result in a trail of serious accidents.

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE AMOUNT OF PUBLIC MONEY SPENT ON ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGNS OF VARIOUS KINDS THE EXAMPLE GIVEN BY THESE TV POLICE OFFICERS CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS AT BEST A HINDRANCE TO SUCH EFFORTS, GLAMOURISING AS IT DOES ROAD BEHAVIOUR WHICH IF PRACTISED IN REAL LIFE WOULD BE A CRIMINAL OFFENCE.

When apprehending criminals Det. Supt. Hackett ('Target') and Det. Insp. Regan ('The Sweeney') use violence - and of the crudest kind - as a matter of course.



REPEATED KICKING IN THE GROIN, VICIOUS PUNCHING IN THE STOMACH ARE BY NO MEANS UNCOMMON PRACTICE BY THE POLICE OFFICERS IN THESE PROGRAMMES. SINCE SUCH BEHAVIOUR IS KNOWN TO CAUSE SERIOUS INJURY THIS IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE. IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH WHICH SHOWS AN UNDOUBTED LINK BETWEEN TELEVISION VIOLENCE AND REAL LIFE VIOLENCE SUCH INCIDENTS ARE CRIMINALLY IRRESPONSIBLE.

(We are aware that the leading actors in these programmes have visited Hendon Police College to watch police being trained to deal with aggressive violence. We would point out the obvious - that the police are trained to deal with the exceptional and in self-defence. Hackett and Regan turn such exceptional incidents into normal practice in which they often take the initiative.)

#### Exploitation of authentic practices

These programmes treat very casually police procedures which are used by the police only in exceptional circumstances and under very strict surveillance, such as 'phone tapping and the taking of photographs of criminals leaving prison.

The type of vehicles and uniforms used and even an apparently authentic underground car park at New Scotland Yard, all give the impression that the programme is dealing with reality rather than fantasy.

Reference is also made to "the fifth floor". It is on the fifth floor at the Yard that the C.I.D. are, in fact, to be found.

The programme 'The Sweeney' tends to decry the hierarchical authority of the police service - the next officer up (Det. Chief Inspector Haskins) is shown as indecisive and a "yes" man. Both programmes show the police bending or breaking the rule as a matter of course.

The slovenly use of the English language by senior officers like Regan and Hackett, which characterises all the programmes is unlikely to build confidence and respect and is, in any case, a bad example to the great number of children likely to be watching.



THE FOUL AND COARSE LANGUAGE IN THESE PROGRAMMES IS TYPICAL  
OF THEM ALL AND USED AS MUCH BY THE POLICE AS BY THE CRIMINALS.

"Target" BBC1 3rd November 1978 9.25 pm - 10.15 pm

"Figures of Importance"

You bastard - 6 times  
 Bloody bastard  
 Who the hell do you think you are  
 Damn business  
 I'll break your bloody neck  
 Bloody hell - 4 times  
 Bloody awful stinking country  
 Bloody  
 Sodding missing  
 This is your bloody life  
 Left the bloody country  
 Sod off  
 Bloody Superintendent  
 Patronising bastard  
 Oh God  
 Lady bloody Beauchamp  
 Whore  
 Bleedin'  
 You rotten murdering stinking bastard  
 That crap  
 Bloody rob him  
 You are a pervert  
 Bloody noses  
 Bloody good  
 Bleedin' road  
 Who the hell is going to?  
 You bitch  
 Little bloody little brass  
 He licks the right arses doesn't he.

"The Sweeney" ITV 12th October 1978 9.00 pm - 10.00 pm

"Money, Money, Money"

Bloody point  
 Bloody money  
 Bloody silly  
 I'll bloody open it  
 Bloody nightmare  
 Nasty bastard  
 Bloody zombie  
 Mind his own sodding business



Bloody rough  
 I'm not in the mood for bitching  
 Bloody way  
 Bloody joking  
 Put the bastards away  
 Evil bastards  
 Poor sod of a bank clerk  
 Piss off  
 Stupid mare  
 Bloody told you  
 Bloody copper  
 Only pissed  
 Eleven bloody years  
 You old pig  
 Sort that slag  
 Poor bastard  
 Bloody well find him  
 Sod it  
 Playing silly buggers  
 Bloody hell  
 Best bastard  
 Bloody cocky with it  
 Bleedin' fiddlers elbow  
 Some bastard  
 Too bloody old for this  
 Cock up  
 Vicious bastard  
 Bloody nightmare  
 Bloody turn up.

CONSTANT BED SCENES - OFTEN EXTREMELY EXPLICIT - CONTEMPT FOR  
 AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN CHARACTERISE THESE PROGRAMMES E.G:-

The off duty hours of the main characters is constantly geared to  
 their "birds". "I wouldn't mind trying that one", "I've pulled two for  
 both of us" (The Sweeney) is typical.

As is:- Chief Supt. Hackett ('Target' 27th October) spends night with  
 girl involved with drug smuggling having just seen off another  
 girl at the airport.

"The Sweeney" (9th November) - Two detectives spend consecutive  
 nights in bed with an informer's girlfriend. Colleague spends  
 next night with her.

"Target" (10th November) Hackett spends night with girl he has  
 not met before (his colleague's girlfriend).

Det. Insp. Regan ("The Sweeney" 30th November) sleeps with  
 girlfriend of a suspect held for questioning.

"The Sweeney" (21st September) One policeman asked another if  
 he was slipping back to the sex parlour "for a quick one".



THE VIOLENCE USED BY THE POLICE IN THESE PROGRAMMES IS ARGUABLY THEIR MOST DISTURBING FEATURE. AS HAS BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED EARLIER IN THIS REPORT VIOLENCE IS USED UPON OCCASION BY THE POLICE. WE CHALLENGE THE MESSAGE OF THESE PROGRAMMES, NAMELY, THAT IT IS USED ROUTINELY AND WITH GREAT VICIOUSNESS. FOR EXAMPLE:

'Target' (1st December) - Chief Supt. Hackett involved in fight with criminal. Feet used brutally by both parties. Hackett ends up with a knife at criminal's throat. He is pulled away by colleague. Kicks criminal into the sea after having had his foot on his throat. (Hackett declares - "I'll find him, even if I have to live up his backside for a month".)

'The Sweeney' (12th October). Police officer chases criminal downstairs, traps him at bottom and delivers vicious punch after vicious punch at the bleeding face and head of a now helpless man. Had to be pulled away by colleague.

(19th October). In the middle of a fight to arrest a criminal, a detective punches a woman straight in the face. A second woman pulled violently to the ground by another police officer.

The smashing of property, the breaking down of doors all add to the violent atmosphere in which these programmes are set. The frequency with which Hackett in particular produces a gun, gives the impression that he carries it all the time, and this, too, adds to the mood of violence which is all pervasive.

The general impression of coarseness and indiscipline is encapsulated in an incident such as this:-

Police, in van on surveillance, pass a milk bottle along the line to last man to urinate, bottle already over half full. Last man refuses, goes outside van rather than use bottle. Whilst outside woman's voice heard saying "how disgusting when there is a lavatory nearby". ('The Sweeney' 21st September).

The frequency with which police officers resort to drink - even in the office ('The Sweeney' 26th October) does nothing for the professional image of the police.



WHO'S WATCHING

## 7-10 years old:

45%	Up to 9 p.m.
9%	" 10 p.m.

## 11-14 years old:

42%	Up to 9 p.m.
42%	" 10 p.m.
9%	" 11 p.m.

## 15-17 years old:

46%	Up to 10 p.m.
42%	" 11 p.m.
6%	12 p.m. or after

PYE Research 1978

CONCLUSION

National VALA is driven to the conclusion that in transmitting these programmes the public duty commitments of both the BBC and ITV have been overshadowed by the battle for ratings. They have exaggerated out of all proportion, certain limited aspects of some police work (like the use of violence) to such an extent that they appear as every day practice. In our view this is irresponsible.

Further: The sexual conduct of the characters is largely irrelevant to the business of catching criminals which is the primary concern of the police. One can only conclude that the gratuitous and frequent sexual activities of Regan, Hackett and Co. are, once again, viewer bait.

SPEAKING AT A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VANDALISM MR. MERLYN REES, THE HOME SECRETARY SAID (1.11.78) "WE ARE DETERMINED TO SUPPORT THE POLICE AND TO FIND WAYS OF INCREASING THEIR EFFECTIVE STRENGTH".



THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JAMES CALLAGHAN AND MRS. MARGARET THATCHER, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, HAVE BOTH EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN ABOUT "MINDLESS DESTRUCTION" AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE STANDARDS AND DISCIPLINES OF SOCIETY.

MR. CALLAGHAN SAID SOCIETY MUST ASK "IF THE YOUNG ARE LEARNING THE WORST LESSONS FROM THEIR ELDERS". WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT AMONGST THEIR "ELDERS" ARE THE BBC AND ITV.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

THE BROADCASTING AUTHORITIES NEED TO BE PERSUADED THAT THEIR CASUAL AND COMMERCIALISED EXPLOITATION OF POLICE PRACTICES IS ANTI-SOCIAL AND UNACCEPTABLE. PARLIAMENT IN GENERAL AND THE HOME SECRETARY IN PARTICULAR, CARRY A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR BROADCASTING STANDARDS.

WE WOULD HOPE THAT THIS REPORT WILL INFLUENCE BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION AS THEY DEBATE THE BILL ON THE FUTURE OF BROADCASTING SCHEDULED FOR THIS SESSION OF PARLIAMENT.

IN THE MEANTIME - A WORD IN THE EAR OF THE BBC AND THE IBA WOULD NOT, IN OUR VIEW BE OUT OF PLACE!

IN THE ASSOCIATION'S VIEW THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM IS THAT THERE ARE NO LEGAL RESTRAINTS - PARTICULARLY ON THE BBC-IN RESPECT OF OBSCENITY AND INDECENCY. BROADCASTING IS SPECIFICALLY EXCLUDED FROM:-

THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACT

THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WILLIAMS COMMITTEE

CURRENTLY STUDYING THE OBSCENITY LAWS.

THE INDECENT DISPLAYS (CONTROL) BILL AT PRESENT

BEFORE PARLIAMENT.

BROADCASTING CANNOT BE ABOVE THE LAW. THE PUBLIC GOOD DEMANDS ACTION TO ENSURE THAT IT IS NOT.

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"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.