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IT IS now 10 years since I saw my first "dirty film".

I had just been elected to the GLC and to keep me out of mischief I was made chairman of the council's film viewing board.

This was considered a harmless backwater at the time, but I couldn't help noticing that more people asked to join the film viewing board than applied to go on any other committee.

I suppose it was not surprising when we were paid £6 a time to view each film.

We only saw films which the British Board of Film Censors had turned down. Distributors whose films had been rejected had the right to appeal to the GLC, which had the final say – and could allow the films to be seen in London.

Somebody should have made a film of our debates

Although I am an avid film-goer, I had no idea what to expect because I had never seen a blue film.

The first film we saw was called *Naughty Girls In The Steamy Sauna*. There was no attempt at a story line, with people who couldn't act, lots of naked flesh and not much else.

When we sat down to discuss it, most of the councillors wanted to give a VB certificate – for Very Boring.

We could not believe anyone would pay money to sit through such garbage. I would have thought that anybody who'd paid money on the assumption that they were going to see a blue movie would've sued under the Trades Descriptions Act.

In the end, we settled on an X certificate and realised that the film viewing board

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WHO WILL WATCH THE BLUE MOVIES NOW?



was going to be a very tedious committee indeed.

Unfortunately for us, giving one of these films a certificate meant that we unleashed an avalanche. And we had to sit through another 20 equally badly made films.

However, we learned from our mistake by the time we had to see our first Kung Fu film. Called *Headcrasher*, it had been turned down on the grounds of excessive violence.

From what I saw, silly children would have been bored by it. But we turned it down because we were warned that distributors had another 100 Kung Fu films waiting for us to view if we gave the first one a certificate.

I always found the discussion after the film more interesting than the film itself. About one third of the councillors would vote to ban anything, one third would pass anything and the balance of power was held by the others who tended to change their minds depending on how far the film went.

Somebody should have made a film of our debates, which were often hilarious.

One "ban anything" councillor always turned up to view the films in a dirty mac and would sometimes go to see them again!

But, as a system, it still works because the film

viewing board is a fairly typical cross section. It is certainly a better system than the British Board Of Film Censors' one of turning down a film because of sex but passing the most sickening violence.

We had to overturn their decisions again and again because they seemed so out of touch with ordinary people.

They wanted to ban a spy thriller, *Scorpio*, because Burt Lancaster poured petrol over another spy and threatened to drop a match on him if he did not come up with the information.

I had to put my head between my knees to keep from fainting

The British Board Of Film Censors had decided that if children saw this film they would copy it and kids all over the country would be burned to death.

Our board had many parents who understood children a lot better than the industry's board and we gave the film an A certificate without any qualms.

No children were burned and within five years the film was shown on prime-time television.

Although the films had seemed harmless enough at the start, things began to change by the end of the Seventies. Violence and sex started going together and "sex-ploitation" became common.

Film after film showed more raping, torturing and mutilating of women and children.

These films were much better produced and acted and before long it was difficult to believe that the mutilation we were seeing was not real.

More than once, councillors had to leave the screenings because they felt so sickened. Once, I had to put my head between my knees to keep from fainting and I remember thinking what sort of people can be turned on by watching these films?

As the films changed, the decisions changed – because the committee reflected the views of the public. We made the sort of decisions the public supported rather than the ones the film industry wanted.

And that leaves Mrs Thatcher with a problem if the GLC is abolished in her proposed local government reforms: who will do the job if we don't?

If the government give it to each of the 32 London boroughs we are bound to get conflicting decisions with people ignoring their

local cinema to go and see a film in an area where it wasn't banned.

And if they give the job to an unelected body, it won't be long before it starts making decisions the film industry wants rather than decisions which are based on the opinions of ordinary people.

CRITICS GOT IT WRONG

ONE film which definitely is not "sexploitation" is *The Return Of The Jedi*.

As I had seen "Star Wars" and "The Empire Strikes Back", I wanted to see the latest episode in the saga.

But when I read the reviews in the papers I was in no hurry.

The reviews slated the film – they said it was boring, silly and the original idea had run out of anything new to say.

Although I went after a fairly grim and depressing day at County Hall, I came out of the cinema wondering what the critics had been talking about.

Jedi was as good – or better – than the original. Lively, funny, exciting, it was one of the most entertaining films I had seen in years.