

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

SUMMER
1998

AN HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE

In his first address to the Association as our new President, the Revd Graham Stevens, speaking at the Annual General Meeting in May, said "It is an honour and privilege to address you as President. Up until today this is something which has alone been conferred on Mary Whitehouse our founder and now President Emeritus. Without her tireless drive and enthusiasm we would probably not be here today and certainly the current broadcasting scene would be even worse. I'm sure you join with me in wishing Mary and Ernest Whitehouse much joy and blessing, peace and good health for them both.

It was in fact four years ago today that Mary announced she was retiring as President of the Association and it was felt by the Executive Committee that to immediately appoint another President was not the way forward. We believed, and still do, as Mary wrote in the postscript of her autobiography: "I foresee more, not less, people taking responsibility with more spokesmen and women becoming experienced in the art of public speaking and instant comment". This we continue to pursue.

"Our latest Report, 'MORE CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE 4' published recently, highlights in that violence on television is far too



◆ Revd Graham Stevens,
National VALA's President

high and is becoming more gruesome and gratuitous.

"And if that is hard to take what do we make of what is now known as the Broadcasting Standards Commission who, until recently, consistently failed to uphold viewers complaints? In defence they offer their opinion,

which is totally irrelevant, often declaring the act of violence, or whatever, to be acceptable within the context of the film. Ignoring therefore that a viewer has nevertheless been offended.

"The Home Affairs Committee, in a Government review in 1994, concluded: "There is some evidence to support the common sense view that videos do have some corrupting influence upon the young which may lead some vulnerable children into crime".

"In March last year the Home Secretary said that recorded crime was at its lowest level since 1990 and there had been a fall of more than half a million offenses since the last election. But violent crime showed its greatest increase since 1989 with a 17% rise in serious life threatening offenses and a 15% rise in rape. Overall violent crime rose by 11%. It rose by 33,400 cases to 344,300 in total. Offenses of violence against the person rose by 26,500 (12%) to 239,000. By October last year some 6 months later further figures showed that violent crime had risen a further 5.2%.

"In March this year the world was again shaken, this time by the terrible atrocity of the shooting incident in Arkansas USA where four children and a teacher were shot dead and others were wounded. Two boys dressed in camouflage aged 11 and 13 were arrested and charged with the murders. The Governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee, said he was in no doubt that society must share some of the blame for the killings. I quote "Whether it is in the television programmes they watch, the movies they see, the language they use, the things they are exposed to, and the glorification of those things, I think we have to be angry at the very culture that helps to breed this kind of response in an 11 year old child".

Graham Stevens concluded his address with a call to all members to do much more to increase membership of the Association: "If each one of us recruited just one new member each year we could have 250,000 members in five years! Let's go to it."

Not able to attend the AGM? The full text of the President's address, as well as the Annual Report, is available on request from HQ.

Porn on TV

Attempts by the Government to outlaw hard core pornography being transmitted into Britain from the Continent are being challenged in the courts. The Proscription Order against 'Eurotica Rendez-Vous', announced at the beginning of the year, has yet to be enforced by the Government and a further Order against 'Eros TV' is being held up by the legal wrangling.

The Independent Television Commission recommended that the channel should be proscribed in October last year. The British Government has not yet been able to implement the ban because of the legal challenge which is expected to go to the European Court of Human Rights. The channel, backed by American and French cash, is using the European Convention on

Human Rights and its guarantee of freedom of speech to fight the Proscription Order. We understand that the Culture Secretary, The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP, has called in outside lawyers to advise on the extent of the Government's powers to outlaw such channels.

The last Conservative Government used Article 22 of the European Directive, which allows nations to outlaw material which could harm children, to outlaw satellite pornography. It implemented a Proscription Order, which makes it illegal to advertise the channel in the UK or sell the necessary satellite equipment to pick up the signals. This system has worked to outlaw and effectively close down channels such

cont'd on back page ►

THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

ALL SAINTS HOUSE, HIGH STREET, COLCHESTER, CO1 1UG

Tel: Colchester (01206) 561155

Fax (01206) 766175

Annual Subscription £10

Price 25p

Web site:

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/NationalVALA>

THE MOVING LINE

Stephen Whittle, the Director of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, was a studio guest on the Channel 4 programme 'Right to Reply' 28th March 1998. When discussing taste and decency issues he said that the Commission is an advisory body and when pressed on standards said that such matters are:

"difficult and, from time to time, extremely subjective judgments about which there is general disagreement in the community. I think what the BSC is saying to broadcasters at that point (when a complaint is upheld) is 'this is where we believe at this moment the line runs now, the line keeps moving'".

National VALA believes that this non-interventionist attitude is completely at variance with the purpose of the Commission and out of step with Parliament's intentions when setting up the BSC originally. It was certainly not the ideal that inspired those who fought to establish an independent forum for dealing properly with public complaints about programme standards.

The task, set by Parliament, to draw up a Code of Practice was of critical importance. Such a Code was seen to be the means through which programmes could be judged and the broadcasters taken to task if necessary. In order to do this a well defined Code is essential.

In setting up the BSC, Parliament called it a Broadcasting **Standards** Council clearly implying, by the choice of title, that there are "standards" and that there was a need to maintain "standards" or bring about an improvement in "standards" that were deteriorating. It is evident from the results of the BSC's annual public surveys that there remains, **despite the functioning of the Commission**, widespread public concern about broadcasting standards. The 5th annual monitoring report of public opinion, published in September 1997 revealed that 64% of respondents believe that there is too much violence on television, 55% too much bad language and 41% too much sex.

Analysis by this Association of complaints shows that there is a general inconsistency and that the outcome of making a complaint to the Commission is akin to a form of lottery. Complaints about brutal violence or obscene or profane language in one programme may be upheld whilst the same or similar material in another programme is not upheld and is excused on a range of grounds not related to the concerns of the complainant.

A Code of Practice, therefore, should play a significant role in determining standards and it should, accordingly, be well defined and well understood by broadcasters and, above all, by the public to whom the Commission is meant to be of service. The public, which pays for the Commission, has a right to expect value for money and a discernible improvement in programme standards as a result of its existence.

The third edition of the BSC's Code of Practice was published in June 1998 and is available from the Commission.

PERSISTENT VIOLENCE

Shooting remains the most common form of violence portrayed in films screened on the five terrestrial TV channels according to a new Report published in May by National VALA. The Report, 'MORE CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE 4', analyses 265 films, shown on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, C4 and C5, which depicted 1251 incidents involving firearms, 918 violent assaults and 409 incidents involving a range of offensive weapons other than firearms.

The Report, which is compiled from what monitors actually saw on screen, says that it is difficult to appreciate in a written Report the violent fantasy world portrayed by film makers, who seem to have an inexplicable desire to concentrate on cruelty, destruction, killing and maiming in their 'works of art'.

165 (62%) of the films were identified as "previously shown" which exemplifies an obstinate disregard by broadcasters of the public concern about violent entertainment. The Association is critical of the pre-screen announcements, or "warnings", which precede some films suggesting that they convey little of the true nature of what is likely to follow and, in many cases, serve to attract viewers. Concern is expressed about vulnerable parts of the body, like heads, throats and genital areas, being shown as targets for violent attack.

Of the 265 films 51 were referred by the public to the Broadcasting Standards Council/Commission on various grounds. Only 6 had complaints upheld with 2

upheld in part. Despite documented concern about violence on TV the BSC continues to deliver findings on violent material that are inconsistent and do little to inspire public confidence.

The Report includes a short extract from the Annual Report of the British Board of Film Classification: *"The BBFC wondered if Hollywood would ever 'wake up with a conscience' about teenagers and the drip-drip effect of films which teach violence, glorify it and celebrate the rewards it brings".* Violence, the BBFC Report says *"has also become far more pervasive, since it occurs in a much larger proportion of films, particularly those targeted at a young audience".*

National VALA's Report, which has been sent to many Members of Parliament who have an interest in media issues, calls for greater public accountability for the British Board of Film Classification, better defined Codes of Practice for Broadcasting and a strengthening of the Obscene Publications Act.

'More Cruelty and Violence' available from HQ Price £5.00.

RELIGION SIDELINED?

National VALA has received a number of letters from members regarding the new look Radio 4. Some felt that religious programmes have been sidelined. We took this up with James Boyle, the Controller of Radio 4, who replied very fully to the criticism. We are pleased to publish part of what he said:

"Religion has not been marginalised on Radio 4. Indeed, with the introduction of the new Schedule, our colleagues in BBC Religious Programmes are being invited to contribute to a much wider range of programmes than ever. There will be more opportunities for occasional series of religious readings and documentaries. Overall, there will be no reduction in the number of religious programmes.

"Please believe me when I express regret that some listeners will find these changes not to their liking. Even if they remain unreconciled to them, I hope I have gone some way towards persuading you that religion remains an important part of Radio 4. I promise you it always will be, so long as I am here".

NEW MINISTRY, NEW REGULATION?

National VALA welcomed the Culture Select Committee's Report 'THE MULTI-MEDIA REVOLUTION' (Volume 1), published in May, and agrees with the general proposition that "the implications" of the conversion from analogue to digital technology "are insufficiently grasped in the country".

"This is particularly so with regard to programming" said John Beyer, the Association's Director. "The broadcasters remain coy about the programming that will be available on all the new digital channels as well as offering no guarantees on diversity and quality. Most people are concerned that they receive a good range of programmes that comply with the requirements on good taste and decency and, above all, that they get good value for money".

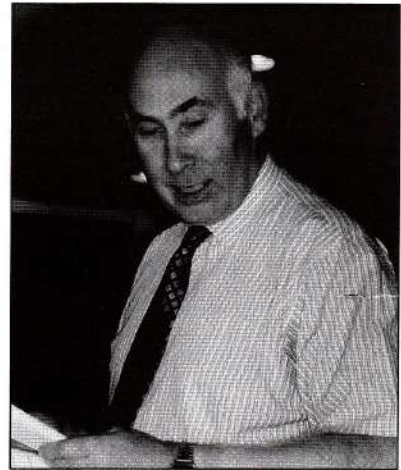
Among the proposals made are that a new Ministry for Communications be established with its own Secretary of State; that a basic framework of standards and decency be devised which fall into four main tiers depending upon the type of service and its means of transmission; that the current regulatory bodies be absorbed into a single Communications Regulation Commission with overall responsibility for statutory regulation of broadcasting and the telecommunications and communications infrastructure.

Mr Beyer, in commending the work of the Committee, said that there are obvious benefits in having a Department of Communications with overall responsibility for the means of communication. It was

important, however, to recognise that communications is now a vast international business that requires co-operation at international level to ensure that broadcast material observes high standards of good taste and decency rather than degenerates into a mire of low budget, poor quality, bad taste, indecent programming.

"We are not in favour", said Mr Beyer, "of a tiered scheme of regulation dependent on the means of transmission and the access to them. Such a system would cause public confusion and undermine the desire for high standards across all means of transmission. Any framework of standards and decency must be well defined and capable of effective application with a range of penalties against those who transgress. A single Communications Regulation Commission, with powers to oversee all transmitted content could overcome the confusion and lack of public confidence arising from the present multiplicity of commissions and authorities which seem to act in the broadcasters' interests rather than for the common good."

We recommend study of this important Report which is available from HMSO priced £10.60 Ref: HC 520-I (1997-98).



◆ Andrew Tomkins delivers the annual financial report at the AGM

SOME FUTURE!

As digital technology takes hold, channels will proliferate and TV will lose its role as the electronic heart of the nation offering a shared experience. Viewers will increasingly be targeted according to their interests, with more specialist TV and pay-per-view. In terms of content, demand will grow in two areas: pornography (an international language) and information, for which the appetite will be endless. More programmes will simply package bits of information, so that viewing will be like turning the pages of a scrapbook ...

The Sunday Times Magazine 24.5.98.

In its response to the European Commission Green Paper on Technological

Convergence, National VALA called on the Commission to set out a well defined framework of regulation within which those involved in the provision of programmes, and other transmitted material, should operate.

The Association, said "the moral, ethical, social and cultural well being of the citizens of Europe should be the overriding concern of those in the communications industry, in whatever capacity, who should regard themselves as servants rather than masters.

"The media industries around the world, and especially in European Union Member States, should be actively encouraged to reach comprehensive agreement on content rather than just technologies. Accordingly, family life should be supported rather than constantly undermined, by the presentation of disordered and immoral role models, in order to bring about social cohesion and a reversal of the trend in family breakdown and delinquency".

Technological What?

John Beyer, the Association's Director, said "Bodies like the European Commission enjoy a certain degree of public trust that our best interests will be safeguarded against the vested interests of the powerful media and information technology industries. It is not apparent in the Green Paper that this is the primary concern. There is an underlying assumption that the "Information Society" is an inevitable consequence of technological convergence and that progress towards this goal is an undisputed 'Good Thing'.

"Clearly there are a number of beneficiaries of the new technology, not least those who manufacture telecommunications equipment, computers, computer software, television sets and video recorders. This being so there is huge vested interest to ensure that the new technology is taken up globally as quickly as possible. The rapid establishment of the Internet around the world and the widespread use of personal computers demonstrates the commercial imperative to promote the technology, and the willingness of peo-

ple to spend money on it. In addition there is a clear, although not widely appreciated, political imperative too."

The Association repeats its doubts over the efficacy of technical devices, such as the "V-Chip", to enable parents or guardians "to filter out certain programmes". What is needed is a workable definition within Article 22 of the EU Directive 97/36/EC, of "pornography and gratuitous violence".

"Unless these terms are defined", said Mr Beyer, "portrayals of explicit sexual conduct and brutal violence will continue to dominate the media to the detriment of the societies the media ought to serve. Failure to deal with these important questions will certainly hinder the praiseworthy purpose of the technological convergence, expressed in the Green Paper, that it has 'the potential to substantially improve the quality of life for Europe's citizens'."

National VALA's response to the EC Green Paper is available from HQ price £2.00p

PORN ON THE NET

The Secretary of State for Education, The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP, recently announced that the Government is to provide £600 million funding for 8,000 schools to be connected to the Internet.

John Beyer wrote to Mr Blunkett saying "I am sure this is well intentioned and will help to equip our children with skills necessary for the future. However, you will know that the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, at their annual conference, expressed serious concern about easy access (four clicks of a computer mouse) to pornographic and other objectionable material on the World Wide Web. The Union called for effective action to be taken against the Service Providers who allow such material to be accessible.

"Despite the setting up of the Internet Watch Foundation little seems to have been achieved in preventing obscene material being made available. Although the Service Providers' claim that they are not accountable for the material published, but only for the means of transmission, we believe that the time has come for the industry to accept, or be given by the Government, full responsibility.

"We believe that it is not sufficient for certain web sites simply to be 'tagged', so that access only in schools is denied with access elsewhere easy. We believe that an effective law on obscenity would be the best solution. This would outlaw pornography and those who publish it, or allow access to it, could be prosecuted. Fear of successful prosecution would be a great and appropriate deterrent."

The Department of Education replied on behalf of Mr Blunkett enclosing a book entitled '*Connecting Schools, Networking People*' setting out guidelines on ICT Planning, Purchasing and Good Practice for the National Grid for Learning. The book includes strategies for dealing with undesirable material.

Eve Trueman, of the Superhighways and Multimedia Unit, said "*The Department takes the issue of undesirable material in schools very seriously indeed and has commissioned the British Educational Communications and Technology agency to prepare separate guid-*

ance for teachers and parents on access to computers ... The DfEE does not dictate arrangements for the use of IT to schools. Arrangements for the supervision of pupils in classrooms will vary from school to school ... Schools should deal with computer or any other form of pornography through their normal disciplinary procedures, involving the police where appropriate. The DfEE also recognises that perhaps the majority of undesirable material circulating in schools is brought in by pupils from their own homes ..."

John Beyer suggested, in a letter published in '*The Times*', 11/5/98, that "**since Britain has assumed the Presidency of the European Union it is now surely an ideal time for the Government to take the initiative and to issue clear proposals for an international agreement to outlaw 'porn on the net' arguing that parents will expect the Government to have in place measures to safeguard their children before such expenditure is made**".

PAEDOPHILE'S CHARTER?

Following the general release of the film '*LOLITA*' in May, National VALA's Director, John Beyer, said, "A trend in 'ageing down' in pornography is evident and the momentum to legalise child pornography by shifting the boundary of illegality is gathering pace aided by judicial and political inaction. The provisions of the Protection of Children Act 1978 must be redefined and effectively enforced for the sake of our children".

Porn on TV

► *from front page*
as '*Red Hot Dutch*', '*TV Erotica*' and '*Italian Satisfaction Club Television*'.

When the ITC first recommended the Proscription Order for '*Eurotica Rendez-Vous*' it said: "The Commission concluded that the channel, based in France, is unacceptable on the grounds that it repeatedly contains material which offends against good taste and decency.

The output of the channel consists almost exclusively of unacceptable pornography".

The ownership of '*Eurotica Rendez-Vous*' is complex. At one time an American company called Spice International was involved. American money is understood to be backing the channel, but the day to day business is run by executives based in Paris. A spokesman for the company said: "*We are doing nothing illegal. The British have a peculiar attitude to sex. The European Convention on Human Rights guarantees free speech and that is what we are relying on in our objections.*" He said the fact that adult subscribers have to obtain decoder cards to unscramble the signals was sufficient protection for children. "*It is up to adults and parents to do the rest to make sure children do not see these pictures*".

The problems over proscribing '*Eurotica Rendez-Vous*' were revealed in an exchange of letters between the Chairman of the ITC, Sir Robin Biggam and the National VALA. John Beyer warned, "If the Government loses this test case Article 22 of the EC Directive will have to be rewritten as a priority."

BOOKSHELF

Prices include postage & packing	copies	@	Total
Quite Contrary by Mary Whitehouse (Hardback)	£6.00	£.....
Quite Contrary (Paperback)	£2.00	£.....
Television and the Family	£1.50	£.....
Television and Violence	£1.50	£.....
Television and Sex	£1.50	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence	£3.00	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 2	£3.00	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 3	£3.50	£.....
Monitoring TV and Radio (Revised June '98)	£1.00	£.....
20 Copies of this issue of <i>The Viewer & Listener</i>	£3.00	£.....
Poster (16x24) (donation please)		£.....
Tel/Fax No & Address Card (Revised June '97)	30p	£.....
Enrolment Leaflet	FREE - state quantity		
NEW ADDITIONS			
Response to EC Green Paper	£2.00	£.....
More Cruelty and Violence 4	£5.00	£.....

DONATION TO THE GENERAL FUND

Date..... Total enclosed..... £.....

Name.....

Address.....

Post Code.....