

# THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

SUMMER 1979

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# ACTION!

**MONITORING TELEVISION AND RADIO IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT PART OF NATIONAL VALA'S WORK. WITHOUT RELIABLE INFORMATION IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US, AS A RESPONSIBLE AND RESPECTED ASSOCIATION, TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO PROGRAMME CONTENT.**

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(See Book List Page 4)

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How does one monitor?  
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- (1) Enclosing a copy of this Viewer and Listener.
- (2) About the 1974 D.H.S.S. memorandum. See page 3.
- (3) About the Government's proposal for 'X' certificate ratings for television programmes. See Editorial.
- (4) Calling for the re-introduction of an Indecent Displays Bill.

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**DATE FOR DIARY:** 17th MAY  
1980, Annual Convention 1980.

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## THE VIEWER AND LISTENER

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# A New Broom!

THE Prime Minister, writing to Mrs. Whitehouse during the course of the Election, made a number of important promises and statements in relation to broadcasting. She said that her Government would "ensure" (our italics) that the broadcasting authorities carry out their proper obligations without offending good taste or encouraging crime; would "insist" (our italics) on strict observance of the rule that items unsuitable for children be shown after 9.00 p.m.

The Prime Minister "would like to see the two Authorities get together to discuss 'a common approach to televised violence' and would like the broadcasting authorities 'to monitor regularly the amount of violence in their programmes'."

The words "insist" and "ensure" open the most intriguing possibilities! No Government has yet been able to do either of these things — or perhaps we should say, no Government has yet had the courage to do them in the face of the loud and orchestrated cries of "censorship" which arise at the first hint of anything which could be construed as "governmental interference" in broadcasting. Yet there are surely ways of insisting and ensuring which would not amount to the kind of government control of TV and radio which we would all deplore.

A common approach by the BBC and ITV to televised violence, and a regular monitoring of it by the broadcasting authorities themselves would translate into reality two demands made by National VALA since its earliest days. But, we hasten to add, no monitoring of violence by the BBC and ITV would be of any value unless the reports produced by them were made public. We are, of course, aware of the new Simm's report on TV violence (BBC) and see it as a further indication that the work of this Association, reinforced by that of Dr. William Belson, Professor Eysenck and Dr. Nias, has made considerable impact.

To one of Mrs. Thatcher's proposals, however, we are implacably opposed. In her letter she refers to the suggestion in the Annan Report that programmes "likely to disturb viewers" should carry "symbols similar to those used by the British Board of Film Censors".

Readers of *The Viewer and Listener* will remember the Winter 1978/79 issue in which we set out the details of the PYE report into Children's Viewing Habits. This showed that 45% of 7-10 years old are watching up to 9 p.m. and 9% up to 10 p.m.; 42% of 11-14 years old are watching up to 9 p.m., 42% up to 10 p.m. and 9% up to 11 p.m.; 46% of 15-17 years old are watching up to 10 p.m., 42% up to 11 p.m., and 6% up to 12 p.m. or after.

Of course such evidence points to a failure of parental responsibility but the broadcasting authorities must not be allowed to place the whole onus on parents. **The BBC and ITV have legal obligations which they must not be allowed to abdicate.** Furthermore such symbols are likely to act as an attraction rather than a disincentive to those very people most likely to be at risk from "offensive" programmes.

We trust the Government will look again at this proposal. We reject it as at best unhelpful, at worst, a positive invitation to licence and the perfect "let out" clause.



The Revd Dr Colin Morris

ANY  
IDEAS  
FOR  
Dr.  
COLIN  
MORRIS?

**Former President of the Methodist Conference, now Head of Religious Broadcasting BBC TV.**

“Morning worship is the unsolved problem of religious television. Is it trading post to a destination—the churches? It has been singularly unsuccessful in leading people down the road to church. Or is it in itself a destination?”

I have a dear sister who would be shocked at the idea of going to a pub. But she watches Coronation Street and the goings-on in Rover's Return with absolute fascination. She is part of the pub constituency qua television, but she'll never make the transition to real life. I myself watch Match of the Day but, like all kinds of people, I would never dream of going to a football match at the ground.

Another problem about worship is this. The light entertainment department wouldn't show a comedy series made up of 45 minutes of pictures of people laughing, yet we show people praying. In other words, the essence of what is happening cannot be captured on the medium.

Church worship on TV is also an unnatural form of professionalism. If the BBC wanted to do *The Pirates of Penzance*, they wouldn't go to the Wimbledon Operatic Society and film it. They'd set up a highly professional studio production of their own. But we, you see, keep going to Wimbledon.

Television implies a global community where none exists. It implies that what happens in Much-Binding in the Marsh is of interest to the north of Scotland. Whereas, if it is genuine worship, it will be incarnate in Much-Binding and so a complete turn-off in Scotland. Genuine worship means that you pray for Mrs. Bloggs at the farm.”

(REFORM (UK))

**Editor's Note: Dr. Morris should not be too despondent! National VALA wrote to the Director General to thank the BBC for the prominence given to and the high quality of the Religious Broadcasting over Easter.**

**Dr. Morris would no doubt be interested in your comments.**

## Putting TV into focus

“Most of the commentary about the harmful impact of television and most of the efforts to improve matters have responded to the symptoms rather than the disease. To be sure, it would be a step in the right direction to have a decrease in the violent and sleazy programs that are broadcast, but a civilised society is neither built nor sustained by a cultural avoidance of the worst in human nature. A worthy and productive society is characterised by the prevalence of high-minded, responsible citizens. A public respect for the principles of honor and virtue and thrift and useful accomplishment can only be perpetuated with continuous and effective reaffirmation in literature and drama and education and religion, and by the examples of parents and fellow employees as well as public figures.”

**Michael Novaks, American Philosopher**



# CONVENTION 1979

"NO Government would dare to pass a Bill to remove the age of consent, but it is being effectively destroyed by back door means," said Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, secretary of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association at its 15th Annual Convention in Birmingham on 28th April.

She said that memos from the DHSS encouraging the distribution of the pill and the setting up of sex clinics for children under age had undermined parental care and responsibility.

It was deeply disturbing to find government-funded bodies like the Health Education Council, the Brook Advisory Centre and the Family Planning Association thanked for help in the list of acknowledgements in a recent sex manual for teenagers by Jane Cousins.

Miss Cousins was secretary of the Law Reform Society which recommended the lowering of the age of consent for hetero and homo sexual relationships, including incest, to 14 years of age.

Sharing the platform were Miss Claire Mulholland, IBA Midland Regional Officer; Mr. Ed Doolan, well-known presenter of Birmingham's commercial station BRMB; Mr. Derek Sangster, editor of Challenge and chairman of Worthing's Community Standards Association; and Mr. Eddie Miller, secretary of the new Glasgow branch of National VALA. In the chair was Mr. Charles Oxley, Vice-Chairman of National VALA Executive.

"Mrs. Whitehouse has been doing the job the Church should have been doing" said Mr. Oxley.

Following Mr. Sangster's statement that Community Standards Associations all over the country were trying to "torpedo bland apathy", Mr. Doolan told the audience to "get involved in local radio".

Miss Mulholland challenged the audience to attend public meetings organised by the IBA in various parts of the country so that they could hear views about programmes, before the coming renewal of contracts. "Attend these meetings. Be specific about programmes regional as well as national. We are not pretending to listen." (See page 1 and 'IBA Meetings' below.)

Full address given by Mary Whitehouse is available — see Booklist.

# National VALA and the Election

STORIES, based upon the replies received from Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Callaghan to questionnaires sent to them from National VALA Headquarters, were carried in the Sun, Daily Telegraph and The Guardian and many provincial papers. (Mr. Steel's reply came too late for inclusion.)

This resulted in headlines such as "Callaghan fails Whitehouse test", "Whitelaw wants curb on lessons on love!", and "M.P.s split over anti-porn campaign"! The first of these needs some explanation for it disturbed some of our Labour supporters who see in that party the nearest political expression of Christian beliefs. May we explain.

One of the questions to Party Leaders was as follows:

*"Would you, if elected to power, take steps to protect the family against the erosion of parental rights, particularly in the field of sex education and by the distribution of contraceptives to minors without parental consent?"*

In his very lengthy reply Mr. Callaghan made no reference whatsoever to the second half of that question. Very great anxiety has been caused in many places — notably Dudley, Doncaster and Bristol — where "the pill" has been given to girls as young as 11 and 12 without their parents' knowledge and consent. The Department of Health under the last Government was actively encouraging Area Health Authorities to provide more adolescent sex clinics from which such distribution could be made.

In our press release we said that we were "startled" by Mr. Callaghan's failure to answer our question since we had hoped that the then Prime Minister "would give parents some reassurance". We could only conclude that Mr. Callaghan personally supported this policy and reluctantly came to the conclusion that if Labour was returned to power "such clinics would become a way of life for our children".

## PARENTS' RIGHTS

"PARENTS are still held to be legally responsible for their children's physical and moral health and welfare, and for their behaviour; yet there is one area of a child's life in which parents have virtually lost their human right; the sexual health and welfare of their children under the age of 16, the age of consent. Parliament has not ordained that this should be so: what has happened is entirely the consequence of decisions taken inside a Government Department working with pressure groups in this field, with whose aims the officials responsible are plainly in complete sympathy."

Valerie Riches, Secretary of The Responsible Society, writing in *The Spectator*, 14.5.19.

## ANNUAL CONVENTION '79 & '80

DUE to the special circumstances surrounding the Election Campaign Mr. James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, was unable to be present at National VALA's Convention on the 28th April last.

However, we have much pleasure in announcing that he has gladly accepted our invitation to speak at our Convention next year.

The date — 17th May 1980 — is fixed — please put it in your diary — and we have been able to book our usual venue, The Midland Hotel, Birmingham.

More details will, of course, be provided nearer the time.

A series of public meetings is being held by the IBA during 1979 in order that, in the words of the Annan Report the "wishes, views and complaints" of the public can be heard in relation to the performance of the various ITV companies.

PLEASE ATTEND THE ONE IN YOUR AREA IF POSSIBLE:

7 Sep	10.45 a.m.	Glasgow/IBA Office
12 Sep	7.30 p.m.	Aberdeen/Cowdray Hall
13 Sep	7.30 p.m.	Dundee/Marryat Hall
14 Sep		Portsmouth
26 Sep	7.30 p.m.	Northampton/Guild Hall
27 Sep	7.30 p.m.	Grimsby/Town Hall
28 Sep		Basingstoke
10 Oct	7.30 p.m.	Aylsham/Town Hall

## IBA MEETINGS

10 Oct	7.30 p.m.	Selkirk (Joint R.O.N.E.)
12 Oct		Newport I.O.W.
23 Oct	7.30 p.m.	Glasgow/McLellan Galleries
24 Oct	7.30 p.m.	Edinburgh/Assembly Rooms
30 Oct	7.30 p.m.	Colchester/The Moot Hall

Ring your Regional IBA for details (see blue card for telephone numbers).



# VALA PROPOSES NEW PORN LAW

## Further submission to the Williams Committee

"NO less a person than Lord Denning (29.11.72) has declared his conviction that the Obscenity Laws (1959 and 1964) "have misfired". He put the blame on "the wording of the Statute" and in particular on the definition of obscenity as the "tendency to deprave and corrupt" those who are "likely to read" an obscene publication.

"We wholly agree with His Lordship's conclusions and claim: (1) that it is impossible to prove "a tendency to deprave and corrupt"; (2) that the phrase "those who are likely to read" is impossible of accurate interpretation. (N.B. pornographers claim that each of their publications is seen by between 10-100 people.) We submit that it is impossible to ensure that only those who choose to see pornographic magazines actually do so. Magazines are, for example, not infrequently left behind in public lavatories, used as much by young boys as by men. Unsolicited pornography is also sent through the post.

"In order that the confusion and licence which has resulted from the imprecise wording referred to above is resolved, National VALA suggests that the word "obscene" should be interpreted as "offensive sexual material" in any publication (book, play, film, record, dance, photograph, drawing or picture) and that "patently offensive sexual material" should be defined as follows:

1. Any explicit act of sexual intercourse, normal or perverted, actual or simulated, including genital-genital, anal-genital, or oral genital, whether between human being or between human beings and animals.

2. Sado-masochistic abuse—meaning flagellation or torture by or upon a person who is nude or partially clothed, or who is fettered, bound or otherwise physically restrained.

3. Masturbation, excretory functions and lewd exhibition of genitals including spread-eagle exposure of female genital organs.

Necrophilia and all sexual practices with children should be declared illegal.

"We are concerned about the use of the concept of "community standards" as a basis of judgement in obscenity cases, believing that it carries certain inherent pitfalls. For example: who is to define "community standards"? Furthermore "community standards" are notoriously exposed to pressure from highly vocal permissive lobbies while public standards are constantly being eroded and sensitivities coarsened by public display of indecency and obscenity.

"We believe that by setting out the above precise definition of obscene material it becomes unnecessary to make any reference to "community standards."

"The acceptance of such clear definitions of obscenity would mean that both publishers and police would know precisely where they stand. This would mean an immense saving of public money since a considerable decrease in the number of court cases would result. Such measures would also result in a most welcome relief from endless public controversy.

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

"Borderline cases would still come before the courts but in such cases a juror should be entitled to draw on his own knowledge of the views of the average person in the community or vicinity from which he comes. Furthermore, he should be reminded that "average person" means the "average person" in the community as a whole, including young, old, educated, uneducated, religious and unreligious — men, women and children."

## THE WAR GAME

Your Honorary General Secretary has received a letter from Mgr. Bruce Kent, Chairman of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, asking National VALA's help in "getting the BBC to change its mind" about its decision not to show Peter Watkins' film "THE WAR GAME".

The film shows the effects of several megaton nuclear warheads exploding within the county of Kent. The immediate effects of the nuclear explosion are shown including the devastating firestorm and the totality of the destruction which follows it. According to a handout from C.N.D.—"The

horrors of nuclear war have seldom been so clearly defined on the screen or been made to seem so terrifyingly imminent as they are in "THE WAR GAME".

As late as 1977 the BBC told C.N.D. that "the showing of this film with its suggestion of the imminence of nuclear warfare and the devastating nature of its effects, would produce a wholly irrational reaction among many members of the audience". And it is a fact that when the film "THE WAR GAME" was shown in the cinemas the Red Cross was on duty to deal with patrons who collapsed or became hysterical through fear.

In his letter Mgr. Kent says that "if THE WAR GAME is thought to be too violent for ordinary viewing then it could be shown late at night with a warning. But TV violence on the BBC is now of such a level that in any event the violence objection is now not very strong". We find this an extraordinary argument particularly at a time when concern about the impact of TV violence upon society is now being taken increasingly seriously.

The issues raised by the threat of nuclear war need a rational, perceptive and compassionate as well as ideological approach.

Nothing is gained by hysteria or by exposing the viewer to emotions and fear which in some — it could well be many — cases are too great for him to contend with.

It is for this reason that we wholeheartedly commend the BBC for its firm resistance to C.N.D. — and other — pressures.

## BOOK LIST

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	20 for £1.25
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