

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

6 May 1987

BROADCASTING COMPLAINTS AUTHORITY

Both the City and Broadcasting have traditionally set their own standards.

Yet the contrast between our record in raising standards in the City (Companies Acts of 1980 and 1981, Insolvency Act 1985, Financial Services Act 1986 and the establishment of the CIB, the Banking Bill and the setting up of the Banking Commission, the strengthening of the Take-Over Panel and the Review of Competition and Mergers policy) and our failure to raise standards in broadcasting is marked.

The existing Broadcasting Complaints Council may have worked well, but because it has such a narrow remit, it is of little practical consequence.

There is no doubt that there is growing public anxiety over the issue. Last week Dukey Hussey mentioned to me privately "we are at present out of step with the general public". I also enclose a letter from the Bishop of Peterborough who has considerable experience in the media.

The Home Secretary's conclusion therefore in his paper for Cabinet tomorrow is a definite step forward.

But it needs considerable strengthening.

Our draft Manifesto

This says "We will establish a new Broadcasting Complaints Authority to produce reports on general programme standards and to receive and deal with individual complaints about programmes. The Authority will lay an annual report before Parliament."





23. April 1987:

My dear Bill,

As you probably know, all Bishops are expected to take on extra responsibilities and over the years I have been much concerned with communications. I was on the Press Council for 6 years; have been a Religious Adviser to IBA for four and a member of the BBFC Video Consultative Council for the last two. As a result I have met a lot of people in the media, have learned something about their attitudes and skills and have come to look on their work with an informed - but very cool - eye.

I have noticed a marked change in what is judged to be acceptable for public showing. That which would have been judged totally unacceptable ten years ago is now the norm.

This is especially worrying when one looks at the portrayal of violence. It seems to me that direct physical violence against people (especially women) is shown with an almost loving care. There is almost an enjoyment of it and the sufferer is not seen as a human being, created in the image of God, but as no more than an object.

The extreme edge of this may be seen in the Video. I have seen very skilful films of this which have been sickening. They were rejected for Video classification by the BBFC censors but they (the censors) and under perpetual pressure to relax their standards and I just fear that if the progression we have seen in the level of what is acceptable continues at the present rate, then those videos could be on our television screens by 1995.

I believe that there is a link between what is turned out night after night on Television and the increase of (for example) rape in this country (24% up last year) and the growth of very unpleasant and sometimes horrific crimes of violence. I believe that what we see alters our feelings about what is acceptable behaviour.

Now the television industry's leaders deny this. They say that television does not influence people in this way. They say that all their surveys show this. (Although the answers to surveys depend on the questions put.) If they are right and people are not influenced by television, why do firms spend millions on advertising? Television is a persuasive medium, well ahead of any other, in my view. I would trust the instinct of the advertiser rather than the statements of the television captains.

They do not like criticism and act as if television was 'theirs' - almost a private possession of those who produce

the programmes. If they are pressed too hard they cry out 'Mrs Whitehouse' - a sort of rallying cry against those who would persecute them!

I see then two problems:

- (i) a lowering of sensibility towards violence especially, which is cultivated by the television screen and the video.
- (ii) The control of television and the video which is in the hands of a group of people within those fields. The thinking of this group has been formed within the confines of their industry and the attitudes and standards are those formed within that closed world.

I believe that outside that world a large number of people are now very worried about what they see and hear on the screens. They feel that we have gone far enough and they increasingly are less cowed by shouts of "censorship".

I believe, too, that in the industry there are people who are worried by what is going on. They are worried about the implications for the future.

When I was present at discussions of the current Bill I noticed that although many people in the industry did not feel that this was quite the right way to do it, a number of them seemed to feel that there was a need for something to be done.

Certainly, out in the country there seems no groundswell of opinion against the current Bill and I have encountered in a lot of places the expression of view that it is time to call a halt: enough is enough.

A law which made those who have such an influence over our lives more answerable would, I believe, have strong support in the nation and would be to our great advantage.

*Law on Bill.*

Professor Brian Griffiths

*1.2 Mr Apologies for the typing.  
Mr Secretary is 262.*