

CREEPING PORNOGRAPHY

By Brian Langton

Public Decency v Film Classification

What is the purpose of the British Board of Film Classification? It used to be possible to visit the cinema secure in the knowledge that everything other than an X certificate guaranteed a film that you could take your grandmother and children to. In fact there was no such thing as X classification when I was a teenager. Films were acceptable or not. Allowed or out! In those days it was considered vulgar for an actress to show the inside of her thigh and producers just did not do it.

Ever since the 1960's we have seen a steady erosion of standards of decency. Scenes which, at one time would have been adequately portrayed by a couple walking off arm in arm or a bedroom door closing, have been gradually replaced with ever more explicit scenes of sexual activity. Up until now, copulation has been simulated — we are assured. Now that assurance no longer holds good.

A general release film (Certified 18) has just been released with scenes showing actual and graphic sex between two of Britain's leading actors who had previously not even been good friends. The films publicists present this as an artistic necessity made compulsory by the script. What sordid rubbish. The inference of what was happening never spoiled a film for me. Even simulated sex has never appeared in the least necessary to a good story.

One critic described this development as having, "... a deeper significance. It is yet another landmark in the current process of lowering the standards

under the guise of liberalism. A sort of weak permissiveness born of moral apathy."

This situation had been crawling out of the dark for a long time, but the real rot set in in 1999, when the British Board of Film Classification — a body financed by the film industry — was ordered by one of its own arbitrarily selected sub-committees to allow the release of seven videos, of films previously regarded as unreleaseable, with an R18 certificate (available only in sex shops). The burglars were running the police force.

Two years on and following the release of a number of dubious films, the BBFC has decided that the British public now regards the 18 certificate as too restrictive. It is hard to see any basis for this since, according to their own literature, at least 54% of the British population disagreed with the statement that people over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of real sex in films and video.

This will not just go away on its own. When the end of communism opened up the old Soviet Union, Who were the first in with their version of a free society? The pornographers! What did they organise for young women desperate for a better life? A trip to a democratic country and a new career — in a brothel!

No civilisation has ever survived a general breakdown of morals. Shall we just watch as our civilisation rots away, or shall we raise our voices and shame those in responsible positions to empower us to clean up the mess?

MEDIA MARCH

Another Great Success

At the end of May, BBC1 showed a feature on the march, followed by a studio discussion. Viewers were asked, "Is society being corrupted by the media?" thousands of viewers responded by telephone and e-mail and 92% of them said "YES".

A similar poll conducted by ITV Teletext over the same weekend asked, "Are you sick of TV sleaze?" 98% of responses were "YES". This must surely send a clear message to the companies about TV standards!

There are still big areas of concern over media standards of responsibility. The production and marketing of pornography in magazines, videos, films, cable and satellite TV and on the internet is practically out of control.

Child pornography on the internet is a major international problem which requires co-ordinated political action.

Government Proposals

Content of TV and Radio broadcasts

Over 250 responses to the government's white paper were received and almost all supported the proposal to set up a watchdog committee called OFCOM. A summary of the responses can be found on the internet at;
www.communication.whitepaper.gov.uk

It was felt that the requirement to balance "Freedom of speech against the need to protect against potentially harmful material" needs to be more clearly set out and, in any case, the object of regulation should be to set standards.

Currently there is a 'watershed' time of 9.30 p.m. after which more latitude is allowed in programme content but this is felt to be ineffective in protecting young people against unsuitable material in this age of 24 hour global broadcasting.

Most suggested that all broadcasters should do nothing to undermine human dignity or civilised values and should show respect for the audience while presenting the best possible information, education and entertainment. To this end, a new offence of *bringing broadcasting into disrepute* should be introduced. OFCOM should give the requirement, in the Human Rights Act of 1998, to protect health and morals priority over all other considerations.

Religious broadcasting is currently banned in Britain, a dubious honour shared only with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan in the whole world. The white paper says that it has a particular capacity to offend those with different views or opinions and yet pornography, violence and obscene language which also have a "particular capacity to offend" is tolerated, and even accommodated, by the authorities.

It is a good idea to make sure that your M.P. is very clear about these issues.

Morality Forum Action

Promoting Promiscuity

By Gwyneth Warner

A number of companies are determined to open Table Top Dancing Clubs, euphemistically known as Gentlemens Clubs, in many parts of the country. At least three of these clubs are already operating in west London and others are planned in many places.

Alerted to what was happening by the appearance of large advertisements in the local press, Morality Forum activists took to the streets. A five strong group of us, under the guidance of John O'Neill, went into Ealing High Road with a petition to inform the public about what is happening and to get signatures and support to oppose such blatant immorality. Many more would have come were it not for work, child and other commitments.

We had a very simple sign board propped up on the pavement and people were reading this and coming to us to ask if they could sign their names. We approached many people who were walking by and almost everyone readily took the pen and signed. We met so many good people.

In fact only two of the ones that I met refused to sign, one was a man who was strongly in favour of the clubs. I put forward the idea that this kind of lewd behaviour was encouraging a corrupt and immoral society but he didn't see why these clubs should encourage that. The other was a woman who felt that people should be allowed to choose whatever they want to do with their lives!

A nun signed the petition and she was so inspired by the campaign that she asked to take away a lot of sheets so that all her fellow nuns could sign. In four hours, we got several hundred signatures and obviously the majority of people were glad to have a lead in doing something to clean up their neighbourhood.

Addresses

Your MP:	House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA Tel: 020 7219 3000
Broadcasting Standards Commission:	7 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS Tel: 01233 237 700 Fax: 01233 235 870
Head of Programme Complaints Unit:	BBC, Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1 1AA Tel: 08700 100 222
Internet Watch Found'n:	East View, Coles Lane, Oakington, Cambridge CB4 5BA Tel: 020 7233 0544 Fax: 020 7233 0397
Board of Film/Video Classification:	3 Soho Square, London W1V 6HD Tel: 020 7439 7961 Fax: 020 7287 0141
Advertising Standards Authority:	2 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HW Tel: 7580 5555 Fax: 020 7323 4339
Mediamarch:	PO Box 53, Cheltenham GL53 7ZQ Tel: 020 8467 6452
Family and Youth Concern:	The Mezzanine, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London SE1 7NQ Tel: 020 7401 5480 Fax: 020 7401 5471
Mediawatch:	3 Willow House, Kennington Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 0NR Tel: 01233 633 936
Pure Love Alliance:	19 Rose Way, Lee, London SE12 8DN Tel/Fax: 020 8318 9313