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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION  
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**INQUIRIES:** MRS MARJ LAURIE  
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The Christian Democratic Party wishes to comment on the following issues which are part of the Terms of Reference of the Broadcasting Inquiry:

**1. Complaints:**

The Christian Democratic Party has significant reservations with the present system of reporting and recording of complaints to television channels. Indeed, prior to October 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) was responsible for recording television viewer complaints. Widespread community concern was clearly shown in 1992 when 6813 complaints were received compared to 2983 in 1990-91. These alarming figures did not include the great volume of complaints made directly to television stations, estimated by the ABT to have been 96%.

Since 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) has advised the public to complain directly to the television stations who no longer have to record any telephone complaints but only those in writing. This policy has naturally resulted in a significant drop in the level of complaints recorded which in turn provides a misleading indication of community concerns regarding current programming standards. By adopting this policy, the ABA has put itself out of touch with community concerns.

The Senate Select Committee on Community Standards in its February 1997 "*Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media*" recommended that:

*"a) a telephone/fax Hotline be re-introduced by the ABA for the public to register complaints about television programs. The Hotline could work in a similar way to the one operated by the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal*

*b) that the ABA report on the operation of the Hotline in its annual report"*

**The Christian Democratic Party supports the recommendation of the Senate Select Committee in this regard.**

## **2. Programming standards- Influence in shaping community views**

In support of its concern as to the level of influence television programs currently have in shaping community views, the Christian Democratic Party wishes to refer to the findings of Prof. David Grossman, a psychologist and retired US infantry officer who recently contributed to the Land Warfare Studies Conference in Canberra. His comments were reported in the magazine "News Weekly", 24 April 1999 and the article was itself an adaptation of a lecture he gave at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, in April last year.

In part this is what he says:

"How the military increases the killing rate of soldiers in combat is instructive, because our culture today is doing the same thing to our children. The training methods the military uses are brutalisation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning and role modelling.

"Desensitisation"

"...Brutalisation and desensitisation are what happens at the boot camp.... (It) is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence and death as a way of life... Something very similar to this desensitisation toward violence is happening to our children through violence in the media - but instead of 18 years-olds, it begins at the age of 18 months when a child is first able to discern what is happening on television. At that age, a child can watch something happening on television and mimic that action. But it isn't until children are six or seven years old that the part of the brain kicks in that lets them understand where information comes from. Even though young children have some understanding of what it means to pretend, they are developmentally unable to distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality.

"The Journal of the American Medical Association published the definitive epidemiological study on the impact of TV violence. The research demonstrated what happened in numerous nations after television made its appearance as compared to nations and regions without TV. The two nations or regions being compared are demographically and ethnically identical, only one variable is different: the presence of television. In every nation, region or city with television, there is an immediate explosion of violence on the playground, and within 15 years, there is a doubling of the murder rate. Why 15 years? That is how long it takes for the brutalisation of three-to-five-year olds to reach the "prime crime age". That is how long it takes for you to reap what you have sown when you brutalise and desensitise a three-year old.

"Classical conditioning".

"...The Japanese were masters of using classical conditioning with their soldiers. Early in World War 2, Chinese prisoners were placed in a ditch on their knees with their hands bound behind them. And one by one, a select few Japanese soldiers would go into the ditch and bayonet their prisoner to death. Up on the bank, countless other young soldiers would cheer them out in their violence. By making them watch and cheer, the Japanese were able to use these atrocities to classically condition a very

large audience to associate pleasure with human death and suffering. Immediately afterwards, the spectators were treated to a sake drink, to the best meal they had in months and to so-called comfort girls.

"... A similar reaction happens all the time in movie theatres where there is bloody violence. The young people laugh and cheer and keep right on eating popcorn. We have raised a generation of barbarians who have learned to associate violence with pleasure, like the Romans cheering and snacking as the Christians were slaughtered in the Colosseum.

"... The third method the military uses is operant conditioning.... A benign example is the use of flight simulators to train pilots. An airline pilot in training sits in front of a flight simulator for endless hours, when a particular light goes on, he is taught to react in a certain way. When another warning light goes on, a different reaction is required. One day, the pilot is actually flying a jumbo jet, the plane is going down and 300 people are screaming behind him.... but he does the right thing. Why ? because he has been conditioned to respond... The military and law enforcement community have made killing a conditioned response. This has substantially raised the firing rate on the modern battlefield....We know that 70 to 80 per cent of the shooting on the modern battlefield is the result of this kind of stimulus-response training..... Now, if you are a little troubled by that, how much more should we be troubled by the fact that every time a child plays an interactive point-and-shoot video game, he is learning the exact same conditioned reflex and motor skills.

"Role models"

"In the military... your drill sergeant.... personifies violence and aggression. Along with military heroes, these violent role models have always been used to influence young, impressionable minds.

"Today, the media are providing our children with role models, and this can be seen not just in the lawless sociopaths in movies and TV shows, but it can also be seen in the media-inspired, copycat aspects of the Jonesboro murders. This is the part of these juvenile crimes that the TV networks would much rather not talk about"

**In view of the foregoing, the Christian Democratic Party supports recommendation 18 of the Senate Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media which recommends that the ABA highlights those television networks showing the most violence and encourage a reduction in violent programming by linking it to the commercial television licence renewing process.**

The Christian Democratic Party believes that the freedom to watch what one wishes to watch is highly restricted. Most programs indeed convey the same type of violent, erotic message. Television programmes have created a popular culture which is everywhere like the air we breathe. Just as we cannot escape the air we breathe, we cannot any longer escape the culture of violence and sex to which we are subjected every day. So at a time when we are demanding that corporations bear responsibility for polluting the air and water, at a time when the outcry against the harm from smoking in public has

had results, we believe it is appropriate to also demand that the entertainment conglomerates show greater accountability for polluting the cultural atmosphere that we all breathe. In this regard, it is obvious that the self regulation programme that the television stations have followed through F.A.C.T.S has failed and tougher, compulsory guidelines need now to be enacted.

### **Programming standards - no longer a reflection of reality.**

The argument has been advanced before that if television stations adopt a high degree of violent content, it is only because we live in a violent society and television should be reflecting reality, not fantasy.

In an article entitled "How the entertainment industry justifies making offensive movies and TV shows", (Readers Digest - January 1996) Michael Medved argues that the level of violence shown on television far exceeds the level of violence prevailing in society. Very few people witness murders in real life but everybody sees them on TV and in the movies. Most of the sexual encounters on TV involve extramarital situations, implying that a higher degree of satisfaction exists in extramarital sex. Yet a 1994 University of Chicago study showed that sexual satisfaction is greater among married people than among single people.

Sociologist James Wilson of the University of California, Los Angeles was reported in the above-mentioned article to have pointed out one curious fact: on city streets where broken windows have gone unrepaired, the crime rate immediately soars. Why? The broken windows make an announcement to the public: here standards have broken down. Here no authority applies. Come and do what you like without consequences.

Today, television and movies have become a gigantic broken window to the world. The portrayal of life without standards and misbehaviour without consequences sends the message that chaos reigns. This is not yet reality but unless some action is urgently taken it will be a self fulfilling prophecy.

### **Implications of a broad market opening commitment fo the audiovisual sector in future GATS negotiations.**

The Christian Democratic Party notes that much of the foreign material shown on television originates from the U.S.A. Much of this material is violent and pro-erotica. The American culture is well known for its propensity to violence.

The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act of 1995, passed with unanimous support by both Houses of Federal Parliament, only facilitates the import of this type of undesirable culture. This was in fact acknowledged by the former Chief Censor, Mr John Dickie, who was reported as saying that as a result of this legislation there is now no barrier for films coming into this country.

The fact that films can be imported without restrictions but must still be classified before they can be shown in public or in the case of videos, sold and hired, is not good enough. Unclassified material can still be shown publicly in practice by arguing that

technically covert rooms in hotels, clubs and other licensed venues are not public places. Yet, we know that it is not difficult for members of the public to have easy access to such places.

**Consequently, the Christian Democratic Party recommends that Parliament re-enacts the Customers (Cinematographic Films) Regulations as a registration test for video, films and computer games. The Christian Democratic Party recommends also that an embargo be placed on MA, R, and X computer games as prohibited imports.**

From a more general perspective, the Christian Democratic Party also supports all the recommendations contained in the February 1997 Senate Select Committee Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media.

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