

**PRESS & TELEVISION**

*New Questions  
on TV Violence*

"The Censoring of TV's Family Hour"  
by Richard A. Blake, in *America*  
(Dec. 11, 1976), 106 West 56th St., New  
York, N.Y. 10019.

When a federal district court in Los Angeles last November struck down television's "family hour," opponents of sex and/or violence on the tube saw the decision as a serious setback. Blake, associate editor of *America*, says that when Judge Warren J. Ferguson ruled that the networks' joint policy was unconstitutional, he raised important new questions about who actually has the right to decide what goes on the air and what broadcast content shall be.

Under the family-hour policy, ABC, CBS, and NBC had agreed in April 1975 to exercise special care in choosing early evening fare suitable for children. The agreement grew out of 1974 meetings between broadcasters and the Federal Communications Commission, with FCC hinting that if the industry did not clean up TV, the federal government might. As the broadcasters laundered their programming for the start of the 1975 fall season, many costly new productions and some reruns were shelved as unfit for family-hour consumption. Even so, there was considerable argument over which of the remaining programs were suitable for family viewing.

A suit brought by a coalition of actors, writers, producers, and others alleged that the three networks, the FCC, and the National Association of Broadcasters had violated the First Amendment and that the FCC in particular had put undue pressure on broadcasters. Judge Ferguson agreed and family hour died.

Blake suggests that strong congressional reaction to the decision has helped proposals to amend the 1934 Communications Act to set new standards for broadcast content. Even if Congress does not go so far as to amend the Act, he predicts that some congressional committee hearings are not only possible but likely, promoting for the first time a full discussion of the roles and responsibilities of sponsors, broadcasters, the FCC, and the hitherto ignored citizen viewer.

*Fleet Street  
Pumps Up the Polls*

"The Competition for Certainty: The  
Polls and Press in Britain" by Sanford  
L. Weiner, in *Political Science Quarterly*  
(Winter 1977), 2852 Broadway, New  
York, N.Y. 10025.

British political polls tend to be less accurate than their U.S. counterparts because the pollsters' chief client is the British national press. Pressures from newspaper editors to produce polls fast and inexpensively result in less-than-scientific sampling, which in turn produces "soft" predictions portrayed as hard fact in screaming headlines by Fleet Street.

Britain's prime ministers rely heavily on published polls and try to

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time general elections to coincide with periods of popular favor. Because the polls are subject to inaccurate interpretation, however, electoral disaster can and does result. Weiner, an MIT political scientist who studied polling in the United Kingdom, cites an example: Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath, believing 1974 newspaper polls that showed a favorable climate for the Tories, called an election and promptly lost to Labour.

In Britain, the last nine elections have been decided by an average plurality of 3 percent, whereas pollsters admit to a 5 percent margin of error. Such disparities help explain party leaders' miscues. Another factor: U.S. pollsters analyze their own data; in Britain, this sophisticated task is left to busy newspaper political writers.

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**OTHER NATIONS**


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### *A New Communist Threat to Europe?*

"Euro-Communism" by Neil McInnes, in *The Washington Papers* (Dec. 1976), Sage Publications, 275 South Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90212.

The growing influence of the big Communist parties of France and Italy has caused alarm in the United States, but McInnes, European correspondent for *Barron's*, credits both these national parties with acceptance of "the peaceful, electoral way to office" and a willingness to soften some earlier ideological dogmas.

How would they behave sharing power as minorities in coalition governments? French Communists, now led by Georges Marchais, would not last long, McInnes predicts, because their commitments to extensive nationalization of industry would soon provoke a crisis impelling a return to an opposition role. In Italy, Communist-inspired drives for such changes as nationalization would come gradually. The Italian party, led by Enrico Berlinguer, is relatively free of "clannishness and factionalism"; it would stay in office longer because it is better disciplined than its French counterpart, and Italy's political structure offers dissidents few alternatives to supporting Berlinguer.

For the other NATO countries, McInnes argues, Communists in the French and Italian governments would be "an inconvenience, not a disaster"; Communist Party leaders in both countries apparently feel that no matter who is in power, Western Europe must remain secure against Soviet military threats. These Euro-Communists, McInnes says, will eventually break publicly with Moscow. They will thus gain votes from the ranks of those compatriots who have long supported Communist domestic goals but have shunned the Party because of its Soviet ties.