

THE WAR GAME



A SANITY BROADSHEET

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SCENES FROM THE FILM.
Top: Survivors left to die in a cast
compound. Lower: 3 miles from the
plosion. The object on the left is a l
which has burst into flames. The vic
cover their scorched eyes.

AFTER NUCLEAR WAR, WOULD THE SURVIVORS ENVY THE DEAD?

Peter Watkins' film *The War Game* gives us a realistic look at the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain and its aftermath. Since it was made the world's stocks of nuclear weapons have grown enormously. The film is dated in details only. The government abandoned the idea of trying to evacuate the population as hopeless some years ago. If war were to come almost all of us

Although the BBC commissioned the film they have never allowed it to be shown. This is a scandal. The people have a right to see this forthright film, which was even described as 'restrained' by one of the censors. Write to the Director General of the BBC, the Radio Times and the newspapers demanding that it must be shown. It is the most important film ever made.

"The most important film ever made ...

In late 1963, following his very successful film "Culloden", BBC producer Peter Watkins began research for what became "The War Game". The BBC was to allocate £10,000 for a film depicting the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain. On November 24, 1965, the BBC announced that it had decided not to televise the film because it was "too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting". Three months later, a BBC circular letter said the film "conveys the sense that what it is showing could happen to the people who might be watching it". In numerous statements since, top BBC officials have referred to the "possibly tragic consequences of vulnerable people switching on by chance, having missed an advance warning" — that is, to possible suicides.

While not denying this possibility, we do *not* believe (1) it should stand in the way of the *genuine national public debate* on Britain's nuclear weapons which has not yet taken place and which a BBC1 showing of "The War Game" would lead to, (2) it was, or is, the real reason for the ban. The film contains precisely the kind of information necessary for such a debate — and in a form that almost everybody would comprehend, which is precisely why we think this fear of suicide was *not* the real reason for the ban...

WHAT DID THE "SELECT FEW" (TO WHOM THE BBC GAVE PRIVATE SHOWINGS IN 1965/66) THINK OF "THE WAR GAME"?

Lord Normanbrook (Chairman of BBC Governors): "This film is now designed as propaganda: it is intended as a purely factual statement, and is based on careful research into official material. I have seen the film, and can say that it has been produced with considerable restraint".

Kenneth Tynan ("Observer" critic): "I suspect that it may be the most important film ever made. Given wide enough dissemination, I believe it might change the course of history... it should not only be televised but screened in cinemas, not just here but everywhere on earth... In refusing to show it, the BBC is like a doctor withholding the truth from a patient who is suffering from a potentially fatal disease; silence may prevent panic, but it also prevents cure..."

Sir Robert Lusty (a BBC governor): "Watkins had accomplished a brilliant documentary with distinction, integrity, and conviction".

Defence correspondents, believing the "deterrent" incapable of failing, were against a television showing of a film which rested on the assumption that it *had* failed: "...we cannot believe in such a film, as the event it depicts means that the counter-deterrent has failed; and it cannot fail unless it has ceased to be credible"

BANNED BY



LEFT: Starving refugees invade a government food control centre one week after three — 'non essential' personnel suffering from various diseases including racial medical facilities and who would otherwise die the slow and unpleasant death led to the film being banned.

("Daily Telegraph"). "The film fails to understand the reality of nuclear warfare... Nuclear warfare is deterrent warfare... Britain and Mr Watkins' Rochester are protected by that deterrence" (S. Times). Auberon Waugh (in the "Sun") claimed the film would increase the chances of war: "Through the democratic process, this country has accepted the logic of the deterrent... the effect will be a proportionate loss of credibility. In fact, Mr Watkins... increases the likelihood of those events which he so ingeniously conjures for us on the silver screen".

WHY WAS "THE WAR GAME" REALLY BANNED?

Michael Tracey ("Guardian" article and letters, 1, 3, 6-9-80), after researching relevant BBC archives, has claimed that Lord Normanbrook was the predominant force behind the ban. Normanbrook had become Chairman of the BBC Governors after being "head of the Civil Service, Secretary to the Cabinet, a member of the Standing Commission on Security" with "impeccable connections among the security services". He was "a key member" of the political establishment. Says Tracey: "It is not surprising that Normanbrook was concerned with a programme which might be seen to be pulling the carpet from under the popular consensus neces-

sary to maintain the thru policy [i.e. "the policy of He was part of the British establishment, particularly the defence policy had brook's concern expressed he was shown the film, Burke Trend, Secretary praising the film's "rest

BY BIRMINGHAM FOR NUCLEAR I

wrote: "But the film is the showing of the film have a significant effect towards the policy of these circumstances, I ought alone to take the whether this film should sion... It seems to me should have an opportunity about this". Two weeks and representatives of Ministry of Defence, the and the Post Office — t brook and 3 top BBC. Among their stated rea "taken as a whole, the

should be shown everywhere on earth."

THE BBC!



after the nuclear attack. RIGHT: Police shoot casualties in medical category radiation sickness who would place an unbearable strain on devastated health that results from radiation sickness. Brutal but realistic scenes like these

trust of British defence of nuclear deterrence"]. British political establishment and intelligence the whole period when had been shaped". Normanbrook himself very soon after, in a letter (9.9.65) to Sir of the Cabinet. After restraint" (see above) he

AM CAMPAIGN DISARMAMENT

is necessarily alarming; and on television might well effect on public attitudes the nuclear deterrent. In I doubt whether the BBC the responsibility of deciding could be shown on television that the Government opportunity of expressing a view weeks later, Sir Burke Trend of the Home Office, the the military Chiefs of Staff – together with Normanbrook – viewed the film. reactions was the feeling that he film would have the

effect (whatever its intention) of lending support to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament". The "major question of policy", they agreed, was whether it was "in the public interest" to show the film on television. 11 days later, Normanbrook had another meeting with Burke Trend and two top civil servants, who reported that the various ministers had been informed about the film and had said the decision should be left to the BBC. Normanbrook added, in his note of the meeting: "it is clear that Whitehall will be relieved if we do not show it". The decision to ban the film from television was made, Tracey believes, by Normanbrook between November 22 and 24 – though "there is no record in the BBC archives" of "who made the decision and why". Tracey says that "both" Normanbrook and Hugh Greene (the then BBC Director General) were "involved" in the decision. Greene was trying "to create a BBC in which imagination and wit, perception and talent could prevail". However, says Tracey, "Normanbrook began to have doubts about the direction of Hugh Greene's BBC". In order to avoid "a confrontation with the Chairman" Greene "went along with Normanbrook's decision that the film should not be shown". Greene has insisted that the decision was his alone – and that Normanbrook "would always

Kenneth Tynan, *The Observer*

fall over backwards to prevent his past career and contacts from influencing his activities in the BBC". Not so, says Tracey – "on this occasion he did not do so, and the papers show that conclusively". The BBC then "put forward the most publicly acceptable reason – the impact of the horror on the sensitive – for "not televising the film . . .

Alasdair Milne, BBC TV's Managing Director, has recently publicly opposed lifting the ban on the grounds that "I find the film is dated". While it is obviously true that the political leaders and flashpoints of 1965 have changed – and that since then nuclear warheads have increased in sophistication, accuracy and numbers, and new delivery systems have evolved – there is no doubt that the picture the film gives of *how* individuals would suffer in a nuclear war remains accurate. In similar vein, Neville Wareham, Chief Assistant to the BBC Secretariat, cites the fact that the film "shows Civil Defence preparations of a kind which the Government no longer envisages". This could easily be put to rights by a quick announcement that plans for mass evacuation (of everyone except able-bodied males over 18) were officially abandoned in the late 1960s. Present plans envisage coercing the population into staying at home.

This "dated" film still regularly attracts large audiences to private showings up and down the country. The British Film Institute, to whom, on 24 February 1966, the BBC agreed to release the film for cinema and club showings, have since held 8 copies – each one constantly booked up 3-4 months in advance. In 1979, Concord Films of Ipswich obtained 5 copies, and now have 20 – and these have also required 3-4 months advanced booking.

Sir Ian Trethowan, the present Director General of the BBC has said: "The BBC exists to serve the public" (Radio 4, 14.9.80). We invite everyone to join in the campaign to persuade the BBC to *serve the public* in this most vital of areas – our future survival. Can anyone really agree with Mary Whitehouse's recent claim that the banning of "The War Game" "was one of the most enlightened decisions made in recent television history"???

SEE IT AT.....

stamp on place and time of showing here.

BAN ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS



THERE IS no defence against nuclear weapons except nuclear disarmament. Our tiny island is crammed with nuclear bases all of which are acknowledged by the Government to be certain targets in a nuclear war.

Every new development in the nuclear arms race brings war nearer. But there is hope, war is not inevitable. A massive awakening of the British public is needed and is beginning to take place. In the end you have only two choices, give up hope or do your bit by joining the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Fill in the form below and we will put you in contact with a group of like-minded people in your town.



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