

War, peace or truth games

THE INDEPENDENT Broadcasting Authority says that there is 'some doubt' over whether or not it will allow Central TV to go ahead and transmit a new 90-minute documentary by John Pilger on nuclear weapons, planned to be shown in three weeks' time. Central TV officials fear that the IBA's actions may create a row to equal the controversy, nearly 17 years ago, when the BBC banned Peter Watkins' documentary, *The War Game*. It has never been shown on TV.

The Central TV documentary – called *The Truth Game* – examines the way in which Western governments have become committed to nuclear deterrence, and is strongly critical of government propaganda which is intended to undermine disarmament moves. This is particularly ironic in view of the IBA's attitude, since it was revealed this week that the Ministry of Defence has just finished preparing its own, government-funded, propaganda film on the nuclear arms race. The MoD film, predictably, is called *The Peace Game* and was shown to journalists for the first time this Thursday.

The IBA's Director of Television, Colin Shaw, told the *New Statesman* this week that the Central TV film was a 'personal view' by John Pilger 'on an issue of considerable political sensitivity'. After receiving details of the film earlier

this month, the IBA intervened to stop the *TV Times* magazine featuring the programme as its cover story. The IBA didn't want to prejudge the issue, said Mr Shaw, but 'here was a programme whose future was in some doubt'.

The Truth Game will now have to be seen by the entire Board of the IBA, a rare event. The screening should already have taken place, but has now been put back to next Thursday. The IBA officials who normally check the contents of programmes in advance said that they were not willing to take the decision themselves. Previous films made by the same team featuring Pilger's 'personal view' of such matters as the atrocities of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia – 'Year Zero' – did not require this kind of special screening. *The Truth Game* is different, say the IBA, because it deals with a 'political controversy' over the activities of the British government.

Even if the IBA Board now pass the film, which is presently scheduled for 23 November, they have already ensured a diminished impact by blocking coverage in *TV Times*, said producer David Munro. Central TV's Managing Director, Charles Denton, added that 'our obvious concern now is that the Authority will say that the film can't go out at all'.

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