

Dishonest Quiz Shows Didn't Do Anything New; Practices Long In Vogue

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NEW YORK (NEA)—The scandal-ridden quiz shows try to take solace from the fact that they didn't do anything new when they fixed TV shows—they merely exaggerated practices that had long been in vogue.

"We sort of drifted into dishonesty," says a man associated with one of the big ones. "We started with guiding the right contestant to the right spot, and it worked, so we did more and more."

Actually, as many people in TV are quick to point out, this is a strange scandal.

No money was stolen, nobody has asked for any money back, no crime was committed (except, perhaps, for perjury) and only a moral wrong was done. It was done to the public, which thought it was watching a clean show.

In analyzing what happened on the quiz shows, it seems certain that the man quoted above was right in saying this was a "drift into dishonesty."

TELEVISION AND, before it, radio long have controlled the programs that you see and hear at home. The fix was in first, to bring this down to its fundamental terms, when some bright announcer held a sign reading "APPLAUSE" over his head and exhorted the studio audience to clap long and loud.

That could be termed a fix because, sitting at home listening to the old superheterodyne, it sounded like the audience was voluntarily going wild. You didn't know about the announcer and his sign and so, in a sense, you were being fooled.

Other programs heard about the man and his sign and copied the technique, and improved on it. Studio audiences were warmed-up ahead of time, the "APPLAUSE" sign became a neon masterpiece that blinked and bubbled, good clappers and laughers were planted in the audience to lead the cheering.

That technique evolved gradually into the present scandal. Along the way, there were many ramifications.

There are the panel shows, where the panel gets everything from gentle hints to blindfolds with slits in them. There are the comedy audience participation shows where gags are preplanned—Groucho Marx, for example, has long used prepared contestants who are told what to say so Groucho can toss in his acid "ad-libs."

There is canned laughter on TV comedy programs—again designed to fool the home audience into believing there's something very hilarious going on. There are stunt programs where, if the stunt seems too hard, a couple of pros are introduced as ordinary citizens, and they toss it off easily.

And so, when quiz shows first became big business, it was natural that they, too, exercise some control over their enterprise. At first, this was in the same innocent vein—they planted professional actors in the studio audience and,

while the contestant was sweating over his answer, there were shots of this "actor" biting his nails in agonizing sympathy.

On the stage, at first, they exercised no control. Gradually, they felt they would have to. Quiz programs, like all others, depend on ratings for their livelihood. And it quickly became apparent that ratings were tied to the personalities of the contestants—if the public liked a certain contestant, they would watch, if they didn't like him, they'd turn to something else.

Control began. It was easy. On shows where the contestant could be asked questions on any category, they simply picked a category he knew well (if they wanted to keep him on) or one in which he was weak (if they wanted to dump him). Where he was confined to one category, they did the same thing within that category.

THEY BECAME too sure of themselves, and searched for easier ways to fix the shows. They gave contestants tests; thus, easily finding areas where they were weak and strong. And they would shoot questions accordingly. For instance, there is the case of the girl spelling whiz, who had shown, on tests, that she was weak in spelling words that had foreign derivations. She got no such words for several weeks, until she had captured the prize.

To all this controlling, the public probably would not object. At least, it was not the blatant giving of answers. Or the almost-as-bad giving of questions.

They turned to that next. Nobody really knows why; they had been able to control their contestants almost perfectly the other way. "It was stupid to give the answers," says a disgusted man, now out of a job because of his association with a defunct quiz. "Stupid and unnecessary. We could do the same thing by picking our questions carefully—and nobody would have ever known."

SOME SHOWS defend their now-exposed policy of giving contestants lists of questions—from which the on-air question would come—by comparing it to similar things outside.

"The CPA exam," says a quiz show figure, "gives a list of questions to men who are going to take the exam. The questions on the test will come from that list. Still, no more than 25 per cent of the applicants pass the test. O.K.—so what's the difference?"

The difference, of course, is that the public isn't involved in the CPA exam, and it was a witness to the quiz shows. The public watched, believed, became emotionally involved in the successes and failures of the contestants it came to know intimately. And now, with the mask stripped from the isolation booth, it feels duped.

It was duped, of course. But it was duped the same way, except for a big difference in degree, that it always has been duped by radio and TV, by the devices radio and TV have used to make every show seem bigger than it is.

Baltimore City Fathers Toss In Towel On Baths

BALTIMORE, Md. (AP)—City fathers are throwing in the towel—the public bath towel, that is. It's economics, pure and simple. The city is running low on cash and something has to go.

It's decided the something will be another Baltimore tradition—the public bath—trailing the 10 cent crab cake and the nickel schooner of beer into oblivion. About the only thing left, some old-timers mutter, will be the marble steps.

Around the turn of the century, the Rev. Thomas M. Beadenkoff came to the conclusion that "personal cleanliness has a close relationship with both health and respect." He was quoted thusly by a Baltimore newspaper of that day.

The good minister went into action. The problem was made more pressing by the fact that "thousands upon thousands of Baltimoreans" lived in houses without bathrooms, bathtubs or even running water.

A bath or shower "not only made you feel better but strengthened the will and tones up the morale generally," the Saturday night ritual advocates added.

The message caught on. The minister convinced the Baltimore philanthropist, Henry Walters.

Walters donated \$50,000 to build the first two public baths. The first was opened in May, 1900. It was followed by the second in April, 1902, appropriately named the "Walters Baths."

The city then set up a special commission to run the soap and scrub business. Other cities adopted the plan.

Walters donated more money as the years went on. The Balti-

more Public School System became convinced youngsters also should shed themselves of the grime of play, and supply them with hot showers to this day.

Business at the bath house, naturally, has slumped. For example, in one peak year 7,572,912 free baths were taken. But in 1958, no more than 100,000 wash jobs were recorded. In fact, the system took in only \$9,000 and cost of personnel was \$78,000—or about 70 cents a bath.

So city fathers have given in to the budget cutters, and the Board of Estimates sadly announced the free public bath system must go. It will result in an annual savings of \$100,000.

The taps will be turned off with 105 employees on the payrolls. Seventy-six of them work at the school baths and most will stay on. The Board of Estimates has agreed to let the youngsters continue to scrub at municipal expense.

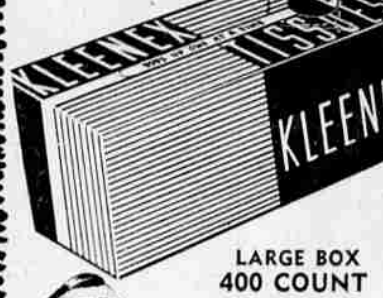
REJECTS PROBE REQUEST WASHINGTON (UPI)—The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has turned down a request from the Joint Council on Educational Television for a special probe of TV channel allotment for non-commercial use.

The FCC said Thursday it already was studying the problem with a view to formulating new rules and standards for both commercial and educational TV.

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