



CBS Photo

First Lady Betty Ford and newsman Morley Safer during her appearance on "60 Minutes." "It may be said she would sooner keep a hot coal on her tongue than a banality."

'A Dangerous Person Who Must Be Watched'

By Sander Vanocur

Betty Ford should be banned from television. She is too honest.

Asquith said of Lord Birkenhead: "He would sooner keep a hot coal on his tongue than a witty saying." Of Betty Ford, it may be said that she

Television

would sooner keep a hot coal on her tongue than a banality.

We are fortunate that her interview with Morley Safer was seen on CBS's "60 Minutes" at 8:30 Sunday night. One hour earlier and she might have been accused of violating Family Hour guidelines by using words such as "abortion" and "affair."

If her daughter, Susan, came home and told her that she was having an affair, she would not be surprised, she said. The Supreme Court's ruling on abortion was "a great, great decision."

She has sought help from a psychiatrist. She has found it.

That was evident Sunday night. It is easier to fool a Freudian than a television camera. It is very much like an X-ray. It cuts through the psychological scar tissue that most of us use to paper over our defects.

Mrs. Ford wears her defects like diamonds. And they dazzle. That is what made her interview at once so memorable and yet so disconcerting.

It was memorable because she was so honest. It was disconcerting that such honesty should seem so memorable. That probably tells us a good deal more about us than it tells us about Betty Ford.

Perhaps we don't believe anything when it comes to politicians or their wives. The politician tells us his wife is just wonderful. The wife tells us that the politician is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obe-

See TELEVISION, B4, Col. 1

dient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. It is a form of ritualistic patois designed to tie people in knots.

That is why we should seriously consider whether Betty Ford should be banned from all further television appearances. She has changed the rules of the game and we are not a people ready for more surprises from our leaders.

Truths, awful truths from our leaders. It boggles the mind. How reassuring was the sequence that followed

Mrs. Ford on "60 Minutes," about Britain's Royal Family, demonstrating once again that the members of the House of Windsor are happiest when they are talking to horses.

We are not talked to as if we are horses. Our leaders know that occasionally horses kick back. We are talked to as if we are small, house-trained dogs, sustained by occasional pats and rhetorical doggy bags.

There is already yapping at Betty Ford's heels. In London, Mary Whitehouse, who campaigns against pornography, accused Mrs. Ford of encouraging sexual promiscuity among young

people. She did no such thing. She tried to encourage honesty among parents.

And, among others, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) held a news conference in Manila to deplore Mrs. Ford's remarks. Said Elder Hinckley: "The great need of our time is to strengthen morality." Elder Hinckley is right. A good place to begin that effort is in government. Betty Ford tried to do that by example. She tried to be honest. That is why she is a dangerous person who must be closely watched.

... Whose Comments Draw Responses

VAIL, Colo. (UPI) — Betty Ford's televised statement that she "wouldn't be surprised" if her daughter, Susan, had an affair has prompted a number of pro and con telephone calls to the White House—mostly con, her press secretary said yesterday.

Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld said Mrs. Ford is not retracting her comment on the CBS television program "60 Minutes," but said what Mrs. Ford really meant was "she would not kick her daughter out" if Susan came home and said she was having a love affair.

Mrs. Weidenfeld said Mrs. Ford meant she would talk to her daughter and help her in any way she could.

The telephone calls began lighting up the White House switchboard Sun-

day night after Mrs. Ford's taped interview was shown. Mrs. Weidenfeld said some of the callers "congratulated Mrs. Ford on her forthright opinions, but most of the calls objected to" her stand.

Mrs. Ford has won the hearts of some feminists by taking strong stands in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion and the use of marijuana. Longtime White House observers said her frank and candid views are unprecedented except perhaps for those of Eleanor Roosevelt, who also spoke out on the issues of the day.

Mrs. Weidenfeld said Mrs. Ford was really only answering a hypothetical question from interviewer Morley Safer.

"What if Susan Ford came to you and said, 'Mother, I'm having an affair?'" Safer asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Mrs. Ford said. "I think she's a perfectly normal human being, like all young girls. If she wanted to continue, and I would certainly counsel and advise her on the subject, and I'd want to know pretty much about the young man that she was planning to have an affair with; whether it was a worthwhile encounter or whether it was going to be one of those—she's pretty young to start affairs."

"But, nevertheless, old enough," said Safer.

"Oh, yes, she's a big girl," said Mrs. Ford.