

CHAPTER THREE

TELEVISION VIOLENCE:
FRAYING OUR SOCIAL FABRIC

Canadian and Foreign Initiatives Against Violence on Television

Public concern over television violence in Canada is not a new phenomenon. The following review shows that public efforts started 18 years ago in Canada, a clear indication of the ongoing nature of the subject. The review demonstrates how this country and others have dealt with this issue and is presented here to inform the search for possible responses. The review includes a description of the recent initiatives taken by the Minister of Communications, the CRTC and the industry in the last few months, as well as examples drawn from the Canadian provinces and other countries. The Canadian public inquiries outlined below are the only two which have dealt exclusively or in large part with the subject of violence on television. Other Canadian public inquiries, such as *Child at Risk*,⁶⁷ the 1980 Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Science, have considered the subject as a secondary theme and will not be reviewed here.

A. THE CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION SYMPOSIUM ON TELEVISION VIOLENCE

The first significant evidence of public concern over television violence was noted in 1975. In August of that year, the Canadian Radio-Television Commission⁶⁸ (CRTC) held a Symposium on Television Violence. The Symposium was not an official hearing and it did not lead to any changes in the CRTC's regulations or policies. Rather, the forum of assembled broadcasters, researchers, government officials, producers, writers, critics, members of the press, and concerned individuals was designed to enable an exchange of views on the complex aspects of television violence and the electronic media. The Symposium's purpose, as set out in the Report published in 1976, was to:

*... broaden traditional perspectives on a difficult issue, to search for neglected causes of television violence within the Canadian system of broadcasting, and to seek broader, more positive and constructive solutions in keeping with Canadian realities.*⁶⁹

B. ONTARIO ROYAL COMMISSION ON VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

A few months earlier, in May 1975, the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry (the LaMarsh Commission) was appointed by the Government of Ontario to study the possible harm to the public interest of the increasing exploitation of violence in the communications industry. Its mandate was:

- 1) *to study the effects on society of the increasing exhibition of violence in the communications industry; [and]*