THE UNTHINKABLE VIOLENCE OF READER'S DIGEST AND THE LAMARSH REPORT

At one point in the progress of the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communication Industry, it came to us that something was lacking, if indeed not being ignored. We were studying segments of Media violence according to definitions on the nature of violence in reality and the nature of violence in the media. In our case it was a survey and research essay on magazines, of which the chapter on Reader’s Digest is reprinted in this issue. The violence record of Time and Reader’s Digest brought the issue to the fore.

Now, many realize that Time is violent in various ways, but how many perceive the American magazine, Reader’s Digest, as violent? Wasn’t it the homey “little” fellow that radiated goodwill and the virtues of ordinary folk in rural America? We knew that was the magazine's image, despite deceptive strategies of carefully selecting articles on a right-wing, conservative, Big-business, and imperialist bias which really did the rural folk no good at all. Or "planting” such articles in other magazines and “selecting” them back. But VIOLENCE? - unthinkable!

It was unthinkable and in point of fact the LaMarsh Commission did not think this issue through. The concept, apparently, never entered their heads and was in fact vigorously resisted by one member of the Commission staff. That concept was the portrayal or espousal of violence that might be called legal, official, institutional or state violence. It is Violence from the Top. It includes the kind of ultra-violence of torture as an instrument of policy being investigated and documented by Amnesty International in score of nations, the violence that was Watergate, the violence of the War Measures Act, and especially the violence that shook the entire world and stirred the moral conscience of millions -- The Vietnam War. It meant the violence of Business that fattens on the huge profits of war, the exploitation of labour in foreign countries, the violence of racism in French Canada, erupted in an Act that was meant for war use only: arbitrary arrest and detention, censorship and the denial of civil liberties when no real apprehended insurrection faced this nation. The list is long -- Rhodesia, South Africa, Iran...

Not that the LaMarsh Commission should have investigated all this as part of the "real world". But it should certainly have realized that media are guilty of an enormously violent role when they cheer on the bully - reinforce and legitimate the powerful, the rich and ruthless as Time and Reader’s Digest have. True Magazine is rated as violent, and is certainly violent, as was the Saturday Evening Post, the National Review, Canada Month, and the whole necrophilic and pornoviolent crew, who portray, glorify or legitimate power.

These magazines (as well as many newspapers) violate and outrage decent human aspirations and well-being. They don’t operate at first-hand; they stand on the sidelines and throw the mud. The symbolic violence of words and pictures triggers the real. The injured, dead, and deprived are a result of white-collar criminality in high places and the media who approve and pave the way with public opinion and editorial prominence.