

A modest proposal for televised violence

The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior reported in January (SN: 1/22/72, p. 55) that a modest relationship exists between the viewing of violence and aggressive behavior. The cautiously worded report came under attack last week as Sen. John O. Pastore (D-R.I.), chairman of the communications subcommittee, held hearings on televised violence.

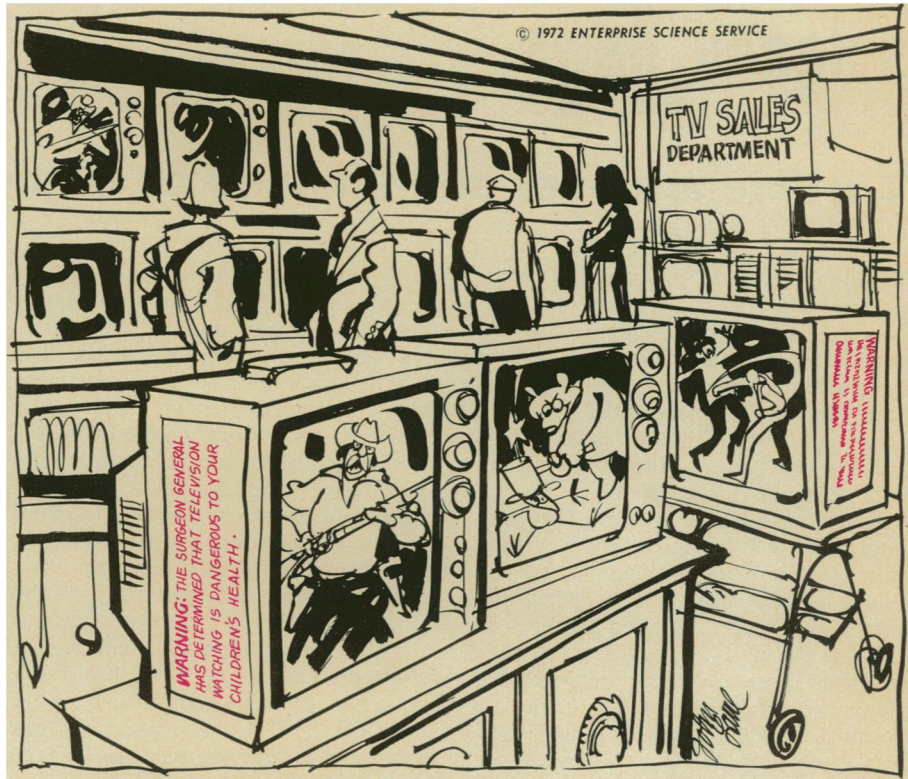
Five volumes of research—the basis for the report—are now available and four social scientists testified that the report itself is only a watered-down version of this research. They complained that the report was prejudiced by network officials who were allowed to veto potential members of the committee. In this way, seven proposed members were actually kept off the Surgeon General's committee, and five of the twelve chosen were industry representatives or industry-connected.

Surgeon General Jesse L. Steinfeld admitted that perhaps the method of selection was improper and said, "A committee such as this, like Caesar's wife, should be above suspicion." Steinfeld also admitted that the modest language of the report was "language acceptable to social scientists." In plainer language he said, "It is clear to me that the causal relationship between televised violence and antisocial behavior by children is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action. . . . My professional response today is that the broadcasters should be put on notice." He proposed a violence-rating system that would help the Federal Communications Commission look at stations in terms of violent content—with an eye to license renewal.

Dean Burch, chairman of the FCC, also testified that something must be done about television's impact on children. But he stressed that television does not exist in isolation. It is only one aspect of the total (often violent) environment. Rather than government action, he proposed that advertisers and industry leaders take the initiative in "the reduction to near-zero of all gratuitous and needless violence in the programming that is specifically directed to children."

The top television industry leaders testified they were aware of the problem and were taking steps to remedy it. Intensified research, diversified programming and additional emphasis on resolving conflict in children's programs through nonviolent means were mentioned specifically.

These self-imposed remedies, however, have failed in the past, said FCC



Commissioner Nicholas Johnson. In a fist-pounding statement (almost as violent as a typical Saturday morning cartoon) Johnson charged the broadcasting industry "with having molested the minds of our nation's children to serve the cause of corporate profit." His proposals to counteract trends in commercial broadcasting were drastic. First, he proposed that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting be funded at no less than \$500 million a year. He noted that CPB's "Sesame Street" cost less than half of one percent of commercial broadcasting's annual revenue. (On the same day the House Commerce Committee authorized \$155 million to run CPB for the next two years.)

Johnson further recommended that the three major networks provide one-third of all prime time on a non-sponsored basis for entertainment, dramas, cultural and public affairs programming. He then called for a reduction by one-half of all commercial time and bunching of commercials on the hour and half-hour. The commercials, he said, should be answered by required counteradvertising. Hearings on this proposal are being held this week by the FCC.

"As for violence," says Johnson, "simply require that two commercial minutes be removed from every half-hour containing violence, and be made available at no cost to responsible professionals to program information to children (and adults) about the adverse consequences of violence."

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) was appalled by Johnson's impassioned plea. Sen. Pastore was less dismayed, but could see no practical means of im-

plementing Johnson's proposals. He closed four days of hearings by proposing that the Surgeon General and the FCC assist the department of Health, Education and Welfare in the creation of a violence index to measure the amounts of televised violence entering American homes every year. □

Immigration, planning and population research

Part three of the report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (SN: 3/25/72, p. 198), released last week in Washington, reemphasizes the importance of population stabilization and makes recommendations on immigration, city planning and population research.

The legal rate of immigration into the United States is 400,000 persons a year, but in 1971 more than 420,000 illegal immigrants were located. The commission regards such large-scale illegal entry as a major threat to population stabilization, one that also creates economic and social service problems. Illegal aliens deprive citizens of jobs and depress the wage scale in areas where they are heavily concentrated. They cannot risk discovery by complaining or joining organized labor.

Immigration can also hide the need for developing and promoting domestic talents. For example, there are more than 7,000 registered Filipino doctors and only about 6,000 black doctors practicing in the United States. If immigration were not providing a large proportion of the demand for doctors, medical schools would be under greater