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Corruption, and
Greed: The
Problem of
Public Television**

By Laurence Jarvik



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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-4999
U.S.A.
202/546-4400

Monopoly, Corruption, and Greed: The Problem of Public Television

By Laurence Jarvik

At this moment,* the public telecommunications act of 1991 is on hold in the United States Senate, keeping 1.1 billion dollars out of the hands of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Last week, *New York Newsday* suggested several reasons for this hold, unprecedented in the history of public broadcasting.

First, it cited a desire to punish what it called “the so - called liberal wing of public TV exemplified by Bill Moyers and Frontline.” Second, it claimed the hold was placed to punish Nina Totenberg, the NPR reporter who reported Anita Hill’s charges against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. The article pointed out that the hold went on seven weeks after the hearings were broadcast. Finally, *Newsday* cited the scandal surrounding the Independent Television Service, which was earmarked to receive \$24 million dollars in the 1988 reauthorization, yet has not produced one minute of television programming to date. ITVS has spent lavishly on overhead, however. It has reportedly expended \$1.5 million dollars to oversee the awarding of \$2.6 million in grants for announced projects.

A recently announced list of planned ITVS projects with titles like “Endangered Species: The Toxic Poisoning of People of Color” and “Warrior: The Case of Leonard Peltier” was the spur for a *Wall Street Journal* editorial asking for “a good explanation” of “why federal money should underwrite efforts such as ‘Citizen Dhoruba,’ a documentary extolling the virtues of a former Black Panther convicted of shooting two New York policemen.”

The editorial suggested the reason was partisan politics: pressure from Representatives Waxman and Markey, powerful Congressmen whose influence led to the establishment of what the *Journal* calls “a vanity press for the film-making wing” of the Democratic party. The *Journal* concluded that this Congressional effort to give millions of dollars to politically connected filmmakers “says as much as ever needed saying about the dangers of government control of information systems.”

This apparent abuse of power has had an immediate result in Congress. Congressman Dick Arme of Texas recently announced he will be introducing legislation to “zero out” the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. He has sent a “Dear Colleague” letter announcing his move to fellow Congressmen and included a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial about the ITVS scandal in his mailing.

The direct role played by partisan politics in public broadcasting has highlighted the basic problem of having a government supported television network dependent on Congressional allocations for its lifeblood. So long as Congress pays the bills for public television, infuriated members of powerful committees will be tempted to interfere with what is produced and broadcast.

Laurence Jarvik is a Bradley Resident Scholar at The Heritage Foundation.

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And so long as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is accountable for the expenditure of tax monies, it will be involved in programming. Long before he arrived at the Supreme Court, Justice Antonin Scalia spoke about the problem of public broadcasting in a 1973 panel discussion recorded in Harry Ashmore's book about the television industry *Fear in the Air*. Contrary to the conventional wisdom at the time, which held that a centralized PBS was a necessity, Scalia pointed out that there were alternative structures possible, and said PBS "could set up a system or systems without having the whole thing in control of one centralized network."

Scalia noted the irreconcilable conflict between fiscal responsibility and the First Amendment in any government funded media effort. He said: "I find here people who profess to be deeply concerned over the problems of government control of the media but who also ardently support a scheme to establish a national television network, with a centralized system of news and public affairs programming that is dependent on the government for its operating income."

"The fact that we can talk about more independence for the press on the one hand, and on the other hand say, but what we really need is a government-funded national news operation, strikes me as wild. It is just wild...If you are going to have CPB in charge, then CPB is going to take the responsibility. I think that is inevitable."

The conflicts within the system have never been resolved. Indeed, as the public television monopoly has withered over time, the infighting between warring factions has grown more intense. The reason for this conflict is directly related to the birth of public broadcasting in the age of the monopoly of television networks.

MONOPOLY

The present system of public broadcasting was designed in the 1960's, when the three major networks had a monopoly on national programming in this country. With the cooperation of ABC, NBC and CBS, who did not want competition for advertising dollars, the Public Broadcasting Service developed into a non-competitive "niche" programming service, filling the cracks in the schedule without threatening network market share.

In 1967, the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television had defined the mission of what would become the *Corporation for Public Broadcasting in Public Television: A Program For Action*. The report provided the specific rationale for the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. It stated: "Public Television...includes all that is of human interest and importance which is not at the moment appropriate or available for support by advertising and which is not arranged for formal instruction." The original definition prohibited both instructional television and sponsored programming as inappropriate for public television.

Thus, from the outset public television was seen as a creature of the network system, filling a broadcast schedule left unfilled by mass media in 1967. The non-competitive nature of public television was built into the very definition of the service. Public broadcasting was, in many ways, serving to protect the network monopoly from the threat of a cable future of hundreds of specialized channels.

Given the tremendous expense of operating a television broadcasting system in the 1960's, it was thought that only regulated monopolies could provide the economies of scale necessary for national television service. Newton Minow's condemnation of commercial television as a "vast wasteland" was seen as justification for the government to support what FCC Commissioner Duggan has recently called a "high-minded" alternative to pedestrian fare catering to the lowest common denominator of the American mass audience. In the words of the Carnegie commission

report, public television would provide “a civilized voice in a civilized community” as an alternative to mindless network programs.

Posed in such altruistic and educational terms, offering the promise of uplift and enlightenment, the Public Broadcasting Act sailed through Congress and became law on November 7, 1967. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting began business with a mission of promoting the greatest achievements of Western Civilization to the American public.

Today the situation in the broadcasting industry has changed. With the breakup of the network monopoly and the advent of cable to the extent where today approximately 90 percent of American homes are passed by cable lines, fewer and fewer types of programming meet the original definition of public television—because advertising and commercial services are providing more and more types of programs.

Much of this advertising and sponsorship has actually gone to public television. Yet, in order to preserve the privileges of their 1960's-style monopoly status, public television has been trying to finesse the issue of advertising and sponsorship, the complete rejection of which is the only rationale for government support given in the original Carnegie Commission report.

This reliance on a monopolistic tradition in television has led to a corrosion of the original ideals of the public broadcasting enterprise and has contaminated the entire structure of public broadcasting. Four years ago, producer Frederick Wiseman—whose award winning films include “Titicut Follies,” “High School,” and a recent portrait of Aspen, Colorado—testified before the Senate Communications Subcommittee regarding the Public Telecommunications Act of 1988. He told the committee there was a cancer at the heart of the public television system in this country because of the process utilized by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to award grants.

He warned: “Public television is a mess. The fact that it is a mess is not a secret. Everybody knows. What is strange is that nothing is done about it. People working in public television seem to be incapable of taking corrective action. They are stuck protecting their own baronies, and battles over turf occupy time and energy that should go into programming.”

He also said: “The result is that quality, which should be the only criterion, is the least relevant consideration in programming. Personal politics, the buddy system, jealousy, and pop ideology dominate the panel’s deliberations.”

Wiseman concluded: “Make no mistake. These are not just my parochial views reflecting my narrow self-interest. They are widely shared by station presidents, managers, and programmers, as well as by independent filmmakers. There are differing views about what might or should be done. But there is a wide consensus on the failure of the present system.”

Wiseman suggested that public television be reformed along the lines of the English Channel Four—which, although Wiseman did not emphasize the fact in his testimony, is a private commercial channel supported by advertising sales. Wiseman noted that “most competent professionals would not consider working in public television in its present form” and called for a drastic re-organization which would emphasize personal responsibility and accountability on the part of PBS and CPB employees.

Partly as a result of Wiseman’s testimony, and the lobbying efforts of numerous groups, a re-organization of public broadcasting began in 1989. As part of this effort, CPB would concentrate on long-range planning, programming decisions were centralized at PBS under Chief Programming Executive Jennifer Lawson, and the Independent Television Service was established to generate work by independent producers.

However the Public Broadcasting Service—despite (or perhaps because of) its new “programming czar”—has failed to secure a number of important programs for its national program

service. It failed to generate any programs at all from the now scandal-marred Independent Television Service. A grant from the Markle Foundation to cover the 1992 elections collapsed and instead went to Ted Turner's private cable channel, CNN. When Texaco announced a new performing arts showcase at a Los Angeles press conference hosted by NEA chief John Frohnmayer it was for the Bravo cable channel. The BBC proclaimed that it would showcase its programming on cable channels such as Bravo and A&E. Ted Turner scored another coup by presenting David Attenborough's spectacular new animal series "The Trials of Life." And in an item which should greatly interest Washingtonians, Fox Television announced it had hired P.J. O'Rourke handle its 1992 election coverage.

It is clear that deprived of its monopoly status for providing cultural program, and deprived by ideology and statute of potentially vast revenues from advertising sales, public television simply cannot compete in the long run for the quality of talent necessary to produce and present quality television.

CORRUPTION

In addition, the business and programming practices of public television executives are hampered by an overly bureaucratic system and conflicting mandates from Congress. Without a clear sense or mission and without the incentive of an honest profit motive, the temptation to squeeze advantages out of inflated overheads and "insider trading" is a matter of real concern. Despite some improvements in management since 1988 public television is still, in Wiseman's words, "a mess."

For example, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has been unable to fully supervise the local recipients of Community Service Grants in the same way it has been unable to prevent or remedy the ITVS scandal.

Public television's franchise of upscale and educated viewers allowed stations to use the revenues from pledge weeks and "non-commercials" for all sorts of curious things without direct accountability to the public. A 1987 *TV Guide* article quoted producer David Stone. "Look around WNET. See the offices and modular furniture, the decor, and you'll see how much has been put into the outward trappings and how few facilities there are for the actual production of television programs." Like the profligate monopoly-era networks which gave them birth, the non-commercial public television stations had a lot of overhead. Stone estimated that the overhead charges could reach as high as 40 percent at some stations, a fact not well-known to most donors.

But using donations for fancy offices and other perks is just the tip of the iceberg. There is the appearance of impropriety in programming practices, as well. Another somewhat peculiar public television practice is what stations call "re-versioning." In this, a foreign documentary purchased, for example, from the BBC in what is called a "co-production"—but is most often a direct sale since BBC contracts rarely allow more than ten minutes of a program to be changed from the British version—is stripped of its English commentary at an American station such as WGBH in Boston. Then, an American narrator adds an American-accented commentary instead of the British one. Frequently there are some slight edits in the picture. When the program is broadcast, hypothetically on a series such as "Frontline" or "Nova," the audience is unaware of the foreign origin of the show except for a discreet credit at the end of the broadcast. The casual "tune-in" viewer has no idea the show was made by the BBC. In a sense, the presenting stations are trying to claim credit for production work they have not done by changing the soundtrack. Overhead costs of this type of simple translation from English English to American English sometimes run as high as \$100,000 an episode. Certainly not the best use of scarce production funds.

Most notable of all the routine deceptive practices of public broadcasting is the sale of commercial air time on what is supposedly a non-commercial service. This is not a new phenomenon.

In 1983 Michael Kinsley called attention to the ridiculousness of public television claiming to be non-commercial in a *Harper's* article entitled "None Dare Call It Commercial."

He wrote, perceptively: "It's really a miracle, when you stop to think about it. Like the virgin birth. Like turning water into champagne, drinking it, and having it too.

"The spectacle of this old hooker [public broadcasting] announcing that she has discovered a method of going all the way without losing her virginity is pretty comical, because there's nothing especially non-commercial about public television...in many ways public broadcasting is more ensnared in commerce than the so-called commercial networks."

In his very droll article, Kinsley went on to cite a fundraising letter from New York's Channel 13 which offered him, for the sum of 50 dollars: "The Thirteen Tote Bag. Carry it proudly. It's the tote with the most cachet in town." In addition to mocking the hype and commercialized snob appeal of public broadcasting, Kinsley chided Channel 13 for its auction, which in 1983 spent 1.3 million dollars to raise 1 million in pledges.

He also savaged the dishonesty of pledge-week fundraising pitches. Kinsley argued: "The place where the veneer of non-commerce is so thick that you can see right through it is in the production and financing of the major PBS network shows. Though they like to scare you during pledge week by saying that your favorite shows, such as 'Masterpiece Theatre,' will go off the air unless you send in money, these shows in fact generally cost PBS nothing...Because underwriters supply them for free."

Herb Schmertz, who headed Mobil's public relations efforts, was just as blunt. He said that the use of "Masterpiece Theatre" during pledge weeks was clearly deceptive and misleading. "It's not truth-in-advertising," Schmertz stated. This sort of institutionalized deception in public broadcasting fundraising sets a pervasive moral tone which cannot help trickle down, Watergate style, throughout the system. And unfortunately, there are many abuses which have made their way into newspapers (and undoubtedly others which have not).

For example, in 1990 the head of Jacksonville station WJCT was reportedly forced to resign over a scandal involving the misuse of auction funds. Apparently he was accused of personally profiting from the annual fund-raiser and pocketing proceeds donors thought went to the station.

On a larger scale, Pittsburgh station WQED—one of the largest in the public television system—became the focus of a multi-part newspaper investigation of station finances revealing, among other questionable practices, that station president and CPB Board member Lloyd Kaiser (whose company car was reportedly a Mercedes) had been receiving salaries from both the non-profit corporation and for-profit entities contracting with WQED. Unable to get certain financial information from WQED, a reporter requested documents from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, including records of a rumored fraud investigation. Her request was denied. In the published story, CPB chairman Marshall Turner was quoted as telling the reporter: "There are some things the public doesn't need to know." The *Post-Gazette* headline read "Station is Wary With Financial Data."

The revelations published in the Pittsburgh paper produced strong reactions against public television among the general population. One published letter to the editor from Rich Kienzle of Greensburg, Pennsylvania—entitled "Publicly Disgusted"—showed that the anger was not only at allegations of financial misconduct, but also at the arrogance and condescension of the public broadcasting establishment's attitude towards the very audience it was supposedly serving.

Kienzle wrote: "Congratulations to the *Post Gazette* for exposing WQED President Lloyd Kaiser's ego-powered, troubled empire...Kaiser believes Pittsburgh viewers don't pledge because this is a blue collar, aging, underpaid and undereducated region. What a shrewd way to encourage donations. Tell people that despite the region's high-tech industries, sophisticated health care facilities, and universities, they're too old, poor, and dumb to understand QED. Can you say 'elitism' boys and girls?"

"Did Kaiser ever consider that people don't donate because of WQED's lousy programming? Aside from children's shows, it often seems like 'Pee Wee's Playhouse' for would-be intellectuals. Viewers respond to quality PBS shows like 'The Civil War,' but WQED and WQEX while downplaying local shows offer Lawrence Welk reruns, bad British soap operas, bizarre discussion programs and a glut of dull how-to shows."

"Former Corporation for Public Broadcasting board member Richard Brookhiser is right. No one scrutinizes public television because it is presented as virtuous. During pledge breaks pompous QED staffers patronizingly remind us of public TV's superiority as they beg money and hawk trinkets like TV evangelists. I don't feel government belongs in broadcasting. The private sector can provide quality programming. They do it on CSPAN, the Discovery Channel and the A&E Network, without all the self-righteousness."

The mess at WQED reported by the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* was not the only problem in the system. Even more serious trouble than a newspaper expose was brewing for public broadcasters. In early 1991 the FCC dramatically punished misconduct by San Francisco's public station KQED, one of the most highly regarded stations in the system. KQED was stripped of its license for sister station KQEC because in the words of the FCC decision: "KQED committed serious misconduct by lacking candor about and misrepresenting the reasons for deactivating KQEC beginning in January 1980. The Commission found that KQED's board of directors adopted a resolution authorizing the deactivation of channel 32 as a means of this approach knowing that the commission had previously expressed disapproval of prior action by KQED deactivating channel 32 for budgetary reasons. Because the Commission found that KQED committed serious misconduct, it denied renewal of KQEC."

In other words, the FCC found that KQED had taken KQEC off the air for long periods of time in order to save money despite having been warned not to do this by the FCC itself, and then misrepresented the situation to the FCC. The charge of misrepresentation is among the most serious that the FCC can bring, and license removal is one of the most serious penalties the FCC can deliver. So serious is it that it reflects on the character qualifications of the license holder to serve the public "interest, convenience, and necessity" as mandated by the Communications Act of 1934. If a station is found to be lacking in good character, if it is found to be a knave, under law it has no right to any broadcast license.

KQED was not found to be quite that bad, and so was not stripped of all its licenses. Nonetheless, the FCC held that this was a case where good programming did not mitigate the effect of lack of candor with the FCC and warned KQED "although the denial of KQED's other licenses is unwarranted on this record, we expect KQED to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that no further misconduct occurs. In this regard, we will carefully scrutinize any indication that further misconduct has occurred in the operation of those stations."

On February 13, 1992 I wrote to CPB general counsel Paul Symczak to inquire as to whether the CPB—in its role of supervising the community service of local public broadcasting stations—ever exercised oversight relating to the “misrepresentation” found by the FCC as part of the \$2 million dollar Community Service Grants provided annually to KQED. As of this date, I have received no reply. However, I did get a phone call from Marshall Turner, present chairman of the CPB board and formerly a board member and at one time Chairman of the Board of KQED. He told me that his position was that “the FCC was wrong and KQED was right.”

When I asked him why he did not fight the decision in court, Turner replied that KQED had lost the case based on what he called “a nit.” KQED, having spent a million dollars on the case apparently did not feel that such a small money-losing station was worth spending any more money on. Turner declined to provide any documentation of his role in the case as a former KQED board member. He maintained he was not personally involved and referred me to Tony Tiano, KQED’s president, who was unavailable—reportedly travelling in China.

A source at the FCC offered a different interpretation of the case. He argued the decision by the FCC had been Solomon - like in wisdom. The baby had been divided and the smaller station taken away, while KQED’s major license remained intact. If KQED chose to fight the decision in court, the station stood a good chance of losing all its licenses because the character clause of the Communications Act of 1934 could be interpreted more strictly in such a way that KQED might be found totally unfit to hold any broadcasting license whatsoever. By accepting the FCC decision, despite the egg on its face KQED minimized its risk of a draconian outcome.

Yet how is it that no one at CPB saw the problems at KQED coming before the FCC stripped the KQEC license? And how could a public broadcaster even think to risk its good reputation for high mindedness by a low-minded “lack of candor” with the FCC?

Perhaps one cause of such problems in public television is the incestuous nature of a system described by former PBS President Larry Grossman as “a system no one in the outside world understands or can penetrate. It is a system that ensures that public television will remain mired in second-class status with a top-heavy, expensive and stifling bureaucracy, a handicap in attracting or retaining truly creative and talented people and an incapacity to make timely program decisions.”

Overly insulated from contact with the outside world, protected by powerful politicians from intense scrutiny, the hothouse environment of public television encourages cronyism, favoritism, and even deception—perhaps even self-deception.

Despite the organizational changes made since 1989, Grossman’s statement, like Wiseman’s earlier one, remains true. In the public television system, the insiders wear many hats despite numerous rules and guidelines designed to prevent conflict of interest. They sit on a system of interlocking boards of directors that govern organizations with extremely complicated financial arrangements practically impervious to outside scrutiny.

For example, Henry Cauthen, head of South Carolina Educational Television, sits on the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the board of the Public Broadcasting Service, and the board of the Public Television lobbying group America’s Public Television Stations, and the board of Public Television Playhouse—the production company for American Playhouse—and the board of the American Documentary, Inc., producer of the controversial documentary series “P.O.V.”

Sharon Rockefeller is the wife of a sitting United States senator active in Democratic Party affairs, sits on the board of both CPB and PBS and is also president of WETA. In a breathtaking political move that transcends even traditional cronyism, according to *The Washingtonian*, Rocke-

feller chaired the WETA search committee for a new president—and she then used the post to select herself for the job.

Henry Becton, whose station WGBH presents “Masterpiece Theatre” and “Mystery!,” also sits on the board of the supposedly independent “American Playhouse.” His station presents the documentary series “Frontline,” and he also sits on the board of directors for “P.O.V.,” supposedly an independent and alternative documentary series.

Clearly such interlocking directorates present the appearance of conflict of interest, and must surely play a role in the apparent lack of competition for drama, documentary and other programs in public broadcasting.

Even the so-called “independents” pretending to be outside the system participate in the magic circle of PBS bureaucracy in the traditional manner. Lawrence Sapadin is Managing Director for “P.O.V.,” the New York based documentary series, while simultaneously serving as Chairman of the Board for the scandal - marred Independent Television Service headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota. Marlon Riggs, who made controversial documentaries such as “Tongues Untied” and is supposedly an “alternative” voice, is funded by both “P.O.V.” and ITVS. He also sits on a program advisory board reporting to Chief Programming Executive Jennifer Lawson at PBS.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting also pays thousands of dollars a year to *Current*—the trade journal of the public broadcasting industry, which is owned by a cartel of public broadcasting stations.

GREED

The desire for public television to increase its income while maintaining its halo has led to many stations developing a split personality. The non-profits create for-profit subsidiaries to raise money and subsidize their overhead. This sometimes results in big business for-profit subsidiaries by the non-profit PBS and NPR stations. For example, Minnesota Public Radio reports grossing \$77 million from the operation of its for-profit trading company which manages two mail-order catalog businesses: *Wireless* and *Signals*. *Signals* is managed under contract to Boston station WGBH. The Minnesota broadcaster recently bought a Minneapolis radio station from the commercial sector for \$12 million dollars with some of its profits, a move opposed by Jim Wychor of the Minnesota Association of Broadcasters, who accuses Minnesota Public Radio of unfair competition for advertisers.

Many other stations and public broadcasting institutions run for-profit businesses. Here in Washington, DC, WETA owns WETACOM, a commercial provider of telecommunications services. On a national level PBS has PBS Enterprises, whose PBS Home Video line grossed \$30 million last year. PBS Enterprises provides teleconferencing and satellite data services for clients such as Bell and Howell and Post-Newsweek. PBS has also announced joint ventures with cable operators such as the Discovery Channel.

New York’s Channel 13 presents “The Charlie Rose Show” in partnership with The Learning Channel. Such public-private deals are not uncommon, and continue to spread throughout the system. For example, “American Playhouse” had a deal with Warner Brothers for “Stand and Deliver.” “The Civil War” was distributed in a deal with Time-Life, now a division of Time-Warner.

Most famous among those who know how to work the PBS system for profit is Bill Moyers. He heads his own for-profit company called “Public Affairs Television Inc.” It occupies office space at New York’s Channel 13 for an undisclosed rent. When Andrew Feguson wrote his *New*

Republic expose “The Power of Myth: Bill Moyers’ Liberal Fraud” he was unable to determine the extent of Moyers’ income from public television, writing “the flow of funds within the hermetic world of public TV is one of its tightest secrets.”

When I wrote to Moyers myself requesting information on his use of tax money, I received a short reply stating “PAT [Public Affairs Television, his company] is an independent privately - owned production company—like so many others in the field—and our business affairs are none of your business.” Moyers later told the *Los Angeles Times* that he had raised \$15 million dollars for Public Affairs Television, from a variety of sources.

David Horowitz has termed the system used by Moyers and others in public broadcasting “reverse money-laundering.” In one case he found Moyers had provided his private company with 4 million dollars from the MacArthur Foundation through a process where funds were cleansed of their non-profit character through a complicated—and perfectly legal—series of pass throughs. In the MacArthur case, he described Moyers operation like so:

“How do you do this? By having your private company, Public Affairs Television, not take the money directly from MacArthur. Instead, you get them to earmark the money for you, but to pay it to public stations WNET and WTTW, which are non-profit, tax - exempt institutions. Unlike your company, they have no shareholders who might profit personally from the investment of philanthropic capital. WNET and WTTW then hire you as a private entity, on a for-profit contract basis. Thus the same capital, which was not supposed to be available for profit making companies (like yours) or to enrich private shareholders (like you) is made available for just that purpose. It is all perfectly legal. And perfectly immoral.”

CONCLUSION

Moyers is forced to conduct the type of enterprise described above because of the structural flaw of public television’s ban on advertising and commercialism. Moyers and other public television producers such as Ken Burns do in fact sell books and videocassettes through public television—directly through so called “book tags” and indirectly as a result of the publicity given by the shows themselves. Yet because of the officially non-commercial status of Public Broadcasting, such a reality must be denied, and public television cannot allow market forces to generate greater revenues for the system. An almost Soviet-style black market is the result, complete with Orwellian Newspeak. Sponsors are called “underwriters,” spot advertising is called “enhanced underwriting,” and the profiteers in this closed system pretend to do charity work. Worst of all is the pattern of institutionalized deception and stonewalling which results on the part of Public Broadcasting executives, stations managers, producers, and funders in order to protect from public scrutiny a system which, as Justice Scalia has pointed out, is a living contradiction.

The sad history of apparent monopolistic practices (even as the real monopoly of public television vanishes with cable, satellite, videocassette), the manifest corruption of the non - commercial ideals, and rampant greed in exploiting the system will only be broken when public broadcasting is privatized.

Hodding Carter, certainly no conservative critic, once said to *New York Magazine*’s Edwin Di-amond of PBS: “It’s the perfect American screwed-up system, combining the worst of both worlds”—bureaucratic Washington and opportunistic capitalism.“ But there is a simple solution Carter did not give. Separate the two. That will end the screw-up.

As Stanton Evans said: "What is needed on both sides of this debate is a further step to the outright abolition of tax - funded television...there is really no reason to have such a system in the first place."

The best solution to the problem of public television is to privatize it, to sell the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to the American Public. In that way, public television can continue to operate on the local level much as before. The average viewer would probably not even notice a change in the schedule the day his membership contribution became an investment in a public company. Privatization of public broadcasting will help solve the deficit while encouraging efficiency, excellence, and truly free speech in the marketplace of ideas.

The philosophical case for a true marketplace of ideas has perhaps been made best by the British writer Sir Kingsley Amis:

"My case," he wrote, "is not that arts subsidies from public money are unjust because they make the poor pay for the rich, true as that is, nor that they encourage waste in productions of opera and dramas (though, they do) nor even that they inevitably attract 'the idle, the dotty, the minimally talented, the self promoters,' as a distinguished poet put it when resigning from the Arts Council some years ago. I say that such subsidy damages art..."

Such subsidy damages art, because, as the British author John Pick adds in his gloss on Amis: "the artist is judged worthy of state aid by a committee, and is paid in advance. Thus the public at large has no voice in the arts and the artist has no incentive to interest, engage, or please the public. The artists's main incentive is to demonstrate that his or her work is avant-garde."

Against the view which pits artist against audience, Pick notes that: "those whose utterances were of interest only to themselves and who could not be understood by anyone else, were once not called 'real artists' by most people, but were more probably thought to be mad...Nor were painters once thought to be worthy of state support simply because nobody liked what they painted." The state subsidy system, argues Pick, "bestows the title of composer, painter, or poet upon those whom it subsidizes, and plainly some state arts bureaucrats do not think that the absence of listeners, watchers, or readers seriously tarnishes their judgement." Pick's view is that state subsidies harm art because what is paid for in advance is decided "at best by a committee of well-meaning but secretive bureaucrats, or at worst by a clique, sensitive only to some prejudged notion of what is, according their secret codes, innovative, avant garde, and new. The artist is thus not just relieved of any obligation to interest and please at least some of the general public, but is also encouraged to please the subsidizers by demonstrating that his work is difficult, advanced, displeasing to the majority and therefore in need of public subsidy. The bureaucrats will generally help things along by announcing that there is nevertheless a need and an articulated demand for this kind of baffling art and that it will, once subsidized and developed, attract business, improve inner cities, bring communities together, bring the tourists in, demonstrate a can - do philosophy, and simultaneously soothe, stimulate and educate one and all."

The absurdity of conventional arguments for federal funding of the American public television establishment mirrors the ludicrous nature of the British Arts Council as criticized by Amis and Pick. The solution to the problem of public television is, as mentioned earlier, simple. In America, as in England, allow Adam Smith's invisible hand to pick and choose the best our culture has to offer.

