

## PRESS &amp; TELEVISION

their paper's marketing offices, while the business folk tinker with "non-news" components, such as comic strips or lotteries.

Freed from the pressure to retain readers and advertisers, monopolies can, theoretically, devote more of their resources to better reporting. Given that fact, asserts Entman, the newspaper monopoly trend may pose a lesser threat to the First Amendment than the sensationalism and gimmickry that can corrupt journalism in fiercely competitive markets.

### *Shielding Public TV*

"The Assault on Public Television" by John Wicklein, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Jan./Feb. 1986), 700 Journalism Bldg., Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. 10027.

The U.S. Congress created America's public broadcasting network in 1967. The purpose: to free some of America's radio and television airwaves from marketplace pressures.

Today the public broadcasting system costs almost \$1 billion annually to operate; roughly 16 percent (\$159.5 million for 1986) comes from congressional appropriations. Such financial support is intended to spur production of "educational" programs and innovative documentaries, in contrast to the mass appeal programs of commercial TV.

But Wicklein, a former officer of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) now teaching at Ohio State University's School of Journalism, contends that the public broadcasting system no longer works. It has become too politicized.

The troubles began with President Richard M. Nixon, who in 1972 tried to eliminate the congressional appropriations for the CPB and to rein in its news-public affairs programs. "The President's basic objective," read one internal White House memo, was "to get the left-wing commentators who are cutting us up off public television at once." He partially succeeded, replacing the CPB's board with his own Republican appointees. Jimmy Carter's White House, while openly praising the public news system, attempted to block a 1980 docudrama, "Death of a Princess," because of its anti-Saudi Arabia stance. (It was aired anyway.)

For his part, President Reagan urged public TV and radio stations to accept commercial advertisements during 1981-82; persuaded Congress to cut \$35 million of the \$172 million in CPB appropriations in 1983; vetoed CPB's proposed 1984 appropriations; and filled the CPB board with his appointees in 1984. Sonia Landau, the current CPB board chairman (and 1984 head of the Women for Reagan/Bush campaign), has spoken out against the public system's programming agenda, trying to steer CPB away from controversial documentaries.

To stop such meddling, Wicklein advocates shielding public TV from "the politics of direct appropriations." Abolish the CPB, he says, and replace it with an Independent Public Broadcasting Authority. Run by nongovernment folk, it would distribute some \$400 million a year to independent stations across America. The money would come from a two percent special tax levied on the earnings of all U.S. commercial broadcasting companies, which netted profits of \$21.3 billion in 1983.