

PRESS & TELEVISION

The Tet Offensive of 1968 united Washington opinion and the media against Lyndon Johnson's conduct of the war. Tet, the surprise communist attacks on South Vietnam's cities, "paralyzed the administration," say the authors. "Whatever ability President Johnson might have had to rally public opinion to the war was lost."

The myth that television caused America to lose the Vietnam war persists. "The war that Americans saw was almost exclusively violent, miserable, or controversial," wrote General William Westmoreland in his memoirs. But in the end, Lichty and Fouhy conclude, TV's impact was mostly to reinforce the prevailing homefront mood of the time.

Freeing the Airwaves

"The Empire Builders" by Rinker Buck and Peter Ainslie, in *Channels: The Business of Communications* (Apr. 1987), 19 West 44th St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

In Western Europe, television has traditionally been controlled by the state. But during the past five years, nearly 20 privately owned networks have been created to compete with state-owned broadcasters for viewers.

Television in Europe is attracting so many entrepreneurs, say Buck and Ainslie, a senior editor and the managing editor, respectively, of *Channels*, that "if every channel and satellite service planned in Europe comes to fruition, by 1990 there will be an annual need for 500,000 hours of programming to fill them."

Private television has existed in Britain and Italy for years. Since 1982, five other European nations have introduced private networks. France has licensed two new private networks, La Cinq and Canal Plus, and plans to sell off the state-owned TF-1 network sometime this year. Belgium has authorized both French- and Flemish-language ad-supported networks, and the Roman Catholic Church will soon begin operating Portugal's first commercial channel.

Many investors in private European television control other media. In West Germany, the Bertelsmann publishing conglomerate co-owns the RTL Plus network. French newspaper baron Robert Hersant has a minority interest in La Cinq and is one of two bidders for TF-1.

Some European governments are resisting for-profit television. In West Germany, the postal service charges \$400 to have a home wired for cable television, and German states have imposed lengthy licensing delays for the private Sat 1 and RTL Plus networks. Opposition Social Democrats have vowed to "protect the franchise" of the state-owned ZDF and ARD networks from private competitors.

Although private European networks buy many American TV shows, the authors suggest that "reliance on cheap American programming" may diminish as commercial networks become more profitable. Profits should rise as limits on advertising revenues are lifted. For example, France is the fourth largest industrial power in the world, but only the 15th largest advertising market, due to restrictions on commercials on state-owned television. The eventual lifting of these restrictions, the authors conclude, will be "a bonanza for those in control" of privately run networks.