

PRESS & TELEVISION

says Miller, "The constant pressure by the press for the expansion of its liberties and its right of inquisition surely contributes to the erosion of privacy and emphasizes the need for protection."

Miller applauds those statutes—opposed by newsmen—that protect individuals from unwarranted public attention (i.e., laws prohibiting the naming of rape victims and restricting the release of certain criminal records). He particularly objects to the zeal of gossip columnists and the revelation of private details of a person's life without cause (e.g., reporters' interest in the sexual preferences of Oliver Sipple, who thwarted an assassination attempt against President Ford on Sept. 22, 1975).

Miller sees a "disturbing situation" at present: Newspapers and magazines have become almost immune to libel suits, justify intrusive and even illegal *means* by touting "beneficial" *ends*, and assert the right to publish any "truth" no matter how private. What is needed is more press self-restraint, says Miller, and, failing that, court action to establish a better balance between press freedom and privacy.

Taxing TV Promos

"A Modest Proposal to Pay for Excellence" by Martin Mayer, in *American Film* (June 1978), P.O. Box 966, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

Since it began in 1969, national public television programming in the United States has been funded by a mix of congressional appropriations, corporate and foundation contributions, and individual donations—an inadequate and uncertain financial base. (Approximately 45 percent of the current \$70-million annual budget comes from federal tax dollars.)

Congress rejected a variety of other financial support arrangements, including the annual license fee on each television set with which Britain funds the programs of the BBC. Mayer, an author and critic, suggests charging broadcasters in this country a fee for the air time they now use to promote themselves and their upcoming programs.

"If the stations and networks were made to pay one-tenth of what they would charge advertisers for this time," says Mayer, "the resulting fund would total \$175 million a year." If broadcasters decided to reduce their self-promotion rather than pay for it, there would be less money in the production fund for public television, but also less advertising "clutter" to annoy television viewers.

The proceeds from the charge on promotional air time, Mayer argues, should be allocated to programs that might otherwise be rejected by public television because of their high cost or limited audience appeal. Completed programs could be offered for sale to the networks or independent stations but provided without charge to public, noncommercial stations. Finances aside, the sooner that public television programming decisions can be insulated from the pressures that accompany congressional funding, says Mayer, the better.