

# The Nation.

## Democratizing the Media

The problem bedeviling the movement for a democratized media since the first Media and Democracy Congress in San Francisco last year has been an excess of complaining and a dearth of ideas about what to do. "We're all still stuck in a mode of protest and a certain defensiveness," said Mark Sommer of the Mainstream Media Project in Arcata, California, at the second Congress, held in Manhattan last month. "We're still attacking the system.... We aren't coming through with something that is pragmatically practical and hopeful."

Still, even if few detailed plans for breaking the grip of the media monopolies emerged at the latest gathering, which at-

Jerold Starr of West Virginia University announced the launching of a grassroots campaign to push for the creation of a Public Broadcasting Trust Fund, to be paid for, perhaps, from spectrum fees on commercial broadcasters. A tax of just 2 percent on those broadcasters would yield \$1 billion a year, Starr said.

Or retain, electronic Library of Congress, generated to serve all the people, all the time, whatever they need and whatever the marketplace is not providing."

To pay for the consortium, Grossman proposes spectrum-use fees, electronic tuition charges, viewer contributions and even commercial advertising, as long as the sponsors are barred from affecting program content. For precedent, Grossman cited the Land Grant Act of the last century, under which the nation sold off public lands to fund public universities in the states.

Other speakers proposed new methods of funding existing public broadcasting to insure its freedom from government and corporate influence. Jerold Starr of West Virginia University announced the launching of a grassroots campaign to push for the creation of a Public Broadcasting Trust Fund, to be paid for, perhaps, from spectrum fees on commercial broadcasters. A tax of just 2 percent on those broadcasters would yield \$1 billion a year, Starr said. Mark Crispin Miller of Johns Hopkins University advocated a 5 to 7 percent tax on all advertisers or carriers of advertising, to generate up to \$10 billion a year to subsidize public broadcasting, including national public radio.

Alternative journalism was much in evidence at the congress, including representatives of alternative media alliances in a number of cities, among them Los Angeles, New York, Toronto and Seattle. The Independent Press Association, composed of more than a hundred alternative magazines, held its annual convention in conjunction with the conference. The *Alternative Press*

Index of more than 250 journals, magazines and newspapers was on sale. Such a gathering of so many alternate media held the promise of a single, interactive alternative media system.

Jim Hightower, knocked off daily ABC Radio just after it was announced that Disney would buy ABC, spoke at the congress. He's back now for two hours a day on about 100 stations of the United Broadcasting Network, thanks to a major investment in UBN by the United Auto Workers. Ben Bagdikian, the elder statesman of media reform, signed copies of the fifth edition of his classic *Media Monopoly* and argued for a clutch of legislative actions, including antitrust prosecution of media giants, severe

ly let's remove the news divisions of conglomerates," Cohen said.

Underlying this and related possibilities is the concept of journalistic institutions controlled by the journalists themselves and a public communications forum run by democratically selected agents of the public. The quality of media democracy would depend, in such a new media regime, on the quality of the democracy the journalists and the public's agents practiced. That would be another set of problems. But we would be better off than we are now, herded en masse this way and that by the fewer and fewer media lords and media megacorporations. RONNIE DUGGER

Ronnie Dugger is co-chair of the Alliance for Democracy.

# Activists mapping campaign for pubcasting independence

Leading media reformers of the progressive stripe are organizing a new group, Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, to campaign for a pubcasting system beholden to neither politicians nor business.

CIPB is hiring an executive director and an associate director to open a Washington office and recruiting a national advisory board that will include "recognizable names," says Jerold Starr, a member of the organizing committee. The group has arranged funding, contingent on successful completion of its first steps, he told *Current*.

Organizers include Jeff Cohen, executive director of Fairness and Accuracy in Media (FAIR); Jack Willis, longtime public TV executive now associated with George Soros' Open Society Institute; University of Wisconsin communications historian Robert McChesney; William Hoynes, author of the 1994 book *Public Television for Sale*; and Starr, a West Virginia University sociologist who has served as a leading critic of WQED, Pittsburgh.

Starr has written what may become a central document for the group—a book to be published this spring by Beacon Press in Boston—*Public Broadcasting in the Public Interest: How to Make Public Broadcasting Accountable to Your Community*. The book describes issues and tactics from long-term struggles with San Francisco's KQED, WQED and pubcasting stations elsewhere.

The CIPB project won unanimous endorsement March 26 at the third national meeting of the Cultural Environment Movement, a media reform group founded by communications scholar George Gerbner, according to Starr. CEM will publicize CIPB's campaign. Starr spoke at the CEM meeting, held in Athens, Ohio, as he did at meetings of the Media and Democracy Congress in 1996 and 1997.

Starr is encouraged by a national poll—released in January by other media reform groups—that found strong support for a law that would require commercial broadcasting companies to help support public broadcasting. (*Current*, Jan. 25). Nearly one in eight of the sample agreed that broadcast companies should be tapped for 5 percent of their revenues, according to the Benton Foundation and the Project on Media Ownership.

"We sense widespread dissatisfaction with the present drift of public broadcasting into commercialism, and the continued inaccessibility to independent producers and the local public," Starr said. ■

# ■ A NEW ATTACK ON PBS

BROADCASTING

By LOUIS JACOBSON

**G**et ready for a new round of attacks against public broadcasting—only this time, not from the right.

For two decades, conservatives have argued that government has no business funding a television network, especially one they believe has a liberal bias. These attacks reached their zenith in 1995, when the then-new Republican majority in Congress sought to dramatically slash appropriations for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the congressionally funded but privately run entity that helps underwrite public television. The assault failed, and backfired against the Right.

Now a very different cluster of critics—ones with roots in liberal politics—is having a go at the issue, establishing a Washington-based grass-roots group to oppose the public-TV status quo. Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, as the group will be called, proposes paying for public broadcasting through a trust fund, possibly one established from monies generated by commercial TV broadcasters, rather than relying on the vagaries of congressional appropriations and the increasingly “commercial” corporate sponsorship spots that run during PBS programs.

The new group’s leaders contend that public TV’s heavy reliance on corporate underwriting makes it less likely the network will air shows that offend big business or “air the voices of those not normally heard,” said Jerold M. Starr, a West Virginia University sociologist who is helping to organize the effort. “We want to stop the radical move towards increasing commercialism and restore public broadcasting to its original founding mission,” said Starr, who three years ago helped lead an effort opposing the privatization of a public television station in Pittsburgh. Public television should be more autonomous and have more local programming and community participation, Starr said. “If it were, we believe it would be able to be a more interesting alternative to commercial broadcasting.”

The new group’s proposals are not very different from those written earlier by some libertarians and Republicans, including Rep. W.J. “Billy” Tauzin, R-La., who sponsored legislation during the

105th Congress (and expects to do so again in coming weeks) that would study the creation of a trust fund.

The idea of a trust fund for public television has been around for years. Aides to Tauzin came up with “four or five good ideas” about sources of money for such a fund, a spokesman said, including redirecting broadcast license fees that are currently paid to the Federal Communications Commission, or funneling to public television the fees that may one day be paid by broadcasters that air anything other than high-definition television on the HDTV portion of the broadcast spectrum.

But trust-fund advocates could find themselves facing formidable opposition if commercial broadcasters begin to think they’ve been stuck with the tab. The National Association of Broadcasters, widely considered one of the most effective lobbying groups in Washington, helped kill a late-1980s effort to fund public broadcasting through a fee on the transfer of commercial broadcast licenses. NAB spokesman Dennis Wharton declined to comment on the new group until he saw its proposals on paper, but he added that “traditionally, the NAB position has been to oppose using any taxes on commercial broadcasters to pay for public broadcasting.” The NAB was neutral on Tauzin’s bill.

Nor is the Association of America’s Public Television Stations, which represents most public-television licensees, ready to sign on to a proposal that would ensnare it in a fight against commercial broadcasters—but the group is nevertheless keeping an open mind on the trust-fund idea. “We supported Tauzin’s bill to study the issue,” said spokeswoman Nancy Neubauer. “We’re willing to look at anything in the long term.”

Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting is intent on making a mark in Washington. The new group has just advertised for two staff positions: an executive director to be paid \$50,000 to \$80,000 plus an associate director for \$35,000 to \$40,000. Starr said the group expects to fill those positions by July. In May, the group will release a content analysis of PBS public affairs coverage. And although he would not name them, Starr said the group has “substantial funding from major foundations.” ■

Trust Fund Bill Pushed**CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT PUBLIC BROADCASTING TO LAUNCH IN JULY**

Hoping to promote restructuring of public broadcasting funding "free from corporate and political influence," Center for Independent Public Bcstg. (CIPB) expects to launch in July. Founder Jerold Starr, known in system for his efforts to stop WQED Pittsburgh from selling 2nd station WQEX (PBR May 22 p11), said he has support from "about 20" key public broadcasters and academics. He wouldn't disclose his funders, saying he has "3 major foundations" that he's "not at liberty to name yet." In addition to working toward public broadcasting trust fund, CIPB will launch local movements to increase stations' accountability to their communities, Starr said.

Predictably, reaction to CIPB and its founder depended on speaker's views on PTV "commercialism." Benton Foundation's Rachel Anderson lauded organization that she said understands that "it's important that we don't have to go down the path of increasing commercialism." Jeff Chester of Center for Media Education called CIPB "very good idea... It's time there was an organization solely focused on public broadcasting and its future." "The more help, the better" in battle to enact trust fund legislation, said spokesman for House Telecom Subcommittee Chmn. Tauzin (R-La.). However, APTS Pres. David Brugger worried that establishing "another public broadcasting organization in Washington could prove to be a diversion of funds and energy that further depletes the already revenue-starved public broadcasting." WQED Pres. George Miles said Starr is "more destructive than anything else" for public broadcasting. He said Starr has "strong opinions" and "doesn't listen to folks." Miles said public broadcasters are "dealing with reality and how to serve our communities. The economics have changed, the competition has changed. Jerry speaks as if it's the same as its always been."

"Essential weakness of public broadcasting" is its "dependence" on support from companies and politicians, Starr told us. He said "galloping commercialism... has permeated all the thinking of all the people" in both national "bureaucracies" and large community stations. He said CIPB will "reinvent the system so it can truly be an alternative to commercial broadcasting" and "fulfill its original mandate" to provide "diversity of voices." Starr said his fights with WQED have taught him that "it's impossible to reform this service one station at a time." Instead, he said, solution "would have to address the root causes."

Creation of trust fund will be CIPB's key issue, Starr said: "We will hope to be the campaign which represents this issue." He said CIPB will be "compatible with a lot of developments" recently, including proposed reauthorization bills, recommendations of Gore Commission, surveys showing public support for trust fund: "People want to take [public broadcasting] off the congressional dole." Although "this has been attempted many times in the past," Starr said, "we think this time we'll do it right," with support from "both sides of the aisle."

CIPB is hiring exec. dir and assoc. dir for Washington office. Ad in *Current, Nation* and *Washington Post* says their jobs will include: (1) Building "broad coalition among educational, cultural, religious, public interest, labor and civil rights groups." (2) Recruiting "national figures" to board. (3) Winning support within public broadcasting system. (4) Getting attention in mass media. (5) Generating "accountability groups and activism at the local level." (6) Promoting reform and opposing "commercialism" before FCC, Congress and system officials. Starr said he already has gotten "75 to 80" resumes, with "quite a few" having "appropriate" credentials. He said other ad postings are planned.

In addition to inside-Beltway work, Starr wants his organization to work on "accountability projects" around country. Said Miles with chuckle: "I can't wait to see my colleagues around the country, how they're going to respond."

Although Starr has been CIPB's most public face, he has partners in project. Other founders reportedly include Jeff Cohen, of Fairness & Accuracy in Media (FAIR); Jack Willis, former PTV executive; William Hoynes, author of *Public TV for Sale*.

# RICH MEDIA, POOR DEMOCRACY

By Robert W. McChesney

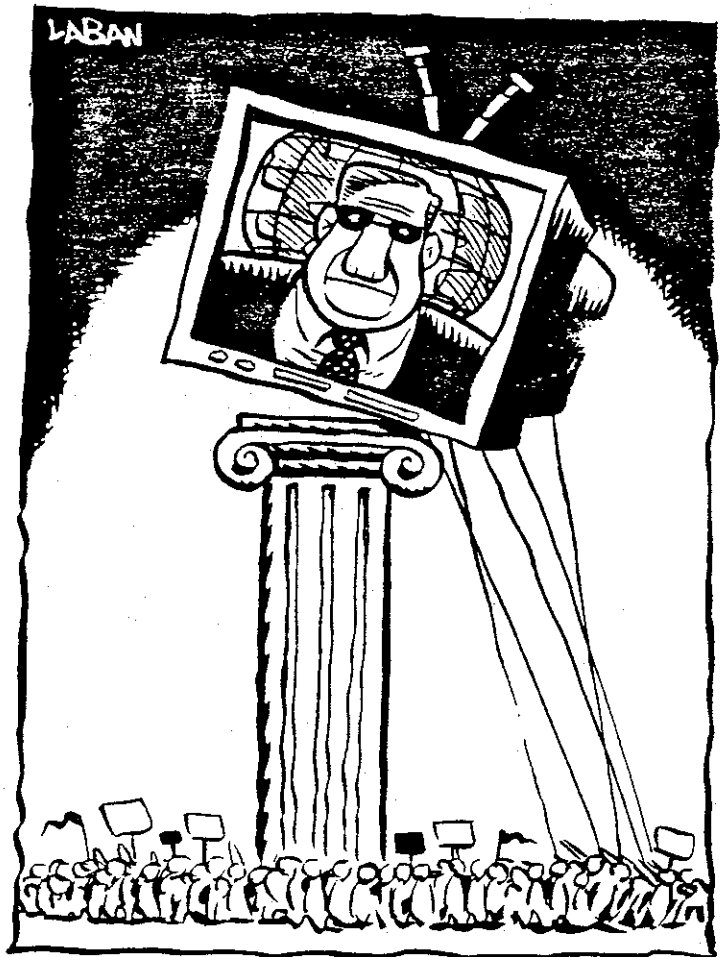
American democracy is in a decrepit state—exemplified by a depoliticization that would make a tyrant envious—and the corporate commercial media system is an important factor in understanding how this sorry state came to be. The corporate media cement a system whereby the wealthy and powerful few make the most important decisions with virtually no informed public participation. Crucial political issues are barely covered by the corporate media, or else are warped to fit the confines of elite debate, stripping the ordinary citizenry of the tools they need to be informed, active participants in a democracy. For those who regard inequality and untrammelled commercialism as undermining the requirements of a democratic society, media reform must be on the political agenda.

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The neo-liberalism is far better than the corporate, a system that establishes political media primarily to propagate pro-business politics and to push the range of political debate ever rightward. The leading U.S. right-wing foundations have devoted nearly all their resources to pushing the media and educational systems to provide more explicitly pro-business positions. The political right also leads the fight against any and all forms of noncommercial and nonprofit media. Failing that, it leads the battle to see that public broadcasting stays within the same narrow ideological boundaries as the commercial media. As a result, PBS refuses to permit labor to sponsor programs about workers but permits business to subsidize programs extolling free enterprise.

Until recently, liberals, progressives and the left in the United States have been notably missing in action in the battle over the media. The response of the progressive and

the national level, new groups like Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting are organizing to establish a genuine, well-funded public radio and TV system, replacing the low-budget, increasingly commercial, elitist operation that is currently under the thumb of corporate underwriters and careerist bureaucrats.



At the same time, the neo-liberalism is far better than the corporate, a system that explains the victory of the democratic activists. The corporatist system will be in the hands of the corporate, a system that establishes political media primarily to propagate pro-business politics and to push the range of political debate ever rightward. The leading U.S. right-wing foundations have devoted nearly all their resources to pushing the media and educational systems to provide more explicitly pro-business positions. The political right also leads the fight against any and all forms of noncommercial and nonprofit media. Failing that, it leads the battle to see that public broadcasting stays within the same narrow ideological boundaries as the commercial media. As a result, PBS refuses to permit labor to sponsor programs about workers but permits business to subsidize programs extolling free enterprise.

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noncommercial media and generate better results from commercial media independent of changes in government policies and the corporate media system. All of labor needs not only to support aggressively its own newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations and Web sites; it also needs to give money and resources to community and nonprofit media that have no direct labor affiliation. This is a crucial point: Labor needs to be willing to grant considerable editorial leeway to the media it subsidizes. Unless it does so, the media will tend to be timid, overly concerned with pleasing labor's political hierarchy, and unlikely to produce a medium with vitality and broad appeal. The same holds true for progressive philanthropies: Alternative media cannot be micromanaged by funders and at the same time develop an audience. (This is something the right understands, and it has contributed to the success of its media program.)

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Former FCC  
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**For Immediate Release**  
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**Contact:**

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## **CITIZENS GROUP KICKS-OFF CAMPAIGN TO REFORM PUBLIC BROADCASTING**

Washington, DC – Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, (CIPB) will launch a national campaign on Tuesday, November 16, at 11:30 a.m. to reform public broadcasting as a public trust, independent of corporate and government influence, as well as to empower community groups to democratize their local stations.

“The time has come to return public broadcasting to its mission to serve as a town hall of the air and a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard,” said Jerry Starr, CIPB Executive Director.

Speakers will include:

**Nicholas Johnson**, Federal Communications Commissioner from 1966-73, who was present at the creation of the Public Broadcasting Act. According to Johnson, “What public broadcasting has failed to recognize is that the ideas of the marketplace do not make a marketplace of ideas.”

**Alvin Perlmutter**, Emmy award-winning producer of over 100 documentaries, including *The Great American Dream Machine*, praises the reforms proposed by CIPB. According to Perlmutter, “Public TV can and should provide hard-hitting documentaries with in-depth analysis of the vital issues of our time. Unfortunately, the increasing reliance on corporate underwriting has deprived the American public of this important service.”

**Janine Jackson**, Program Director of Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, is concerned that, “Public broadcasting routinely covers our society from the top down (government and corporate officials and Wall Street investors), but almost never from the bottom up (workers, consumers and those concerned with the environment).”

**George Gerbner**, Professor of Telecommunications at Temple University and Founding Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, advises, “For most of human history, our children’s stories were told by caring people with something to tell, not corporations with something to sell. It is a tragedy that a once safe public broadcasting environment now has been invaded by these same commercial forces.”

As five-second underwriting acknowledgements have expanded into 30-second commercials, a goal of CIPB will be to reclaim the Carnegie Commission’s mission of public broadcasting to create programs “not to sell products or to meet demands of the marketplace,” but to “enhance citizenship and public service.”

CIPB will organize local chapters to democratize the governance and programming of their community’s public broadcasting stations. CIPB also will act as a clearinghouse on the activities and accomplishments of these local chapters and on programs available for airing both nationally and locally.

Starr, Jackson, Perlmutter, and Gerbner will sign the CIPB *Declaration of Public Broadcasting Independence* during the press conference.

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## *Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting* Trust campaign launches with foundation backing

*Originally published in Current, Nov. 15, 1999*

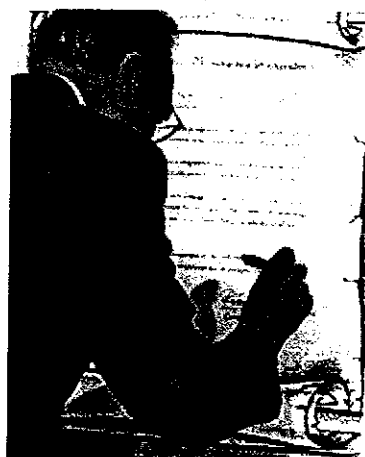
*By Steve Behrens*

With backing from progressive foundations, a new national campaign to roll-back government and corporate control of public broadcasting will go public this week in Washington, D.C.

Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, proposed three years ago by Pittsburgh media activist Jerold Starr, planned a press debut Nov. 16. CIPB has opened its Washington office with Starr as executive director and with major funding from George Soros's Open Society Institute and the Florence & John Schumann Foundation. At both foundations, CIPB's key contacts are prominent in public TV--OSI fellow Jack Willis, a longtime public TV producer who formerly managed KTCA in Twin Cities, and Schumann President Bill Moyers, one of public TV's leading journalist/producers.

Starr, a professor at West Virginia University, hopes to create a lasting organization that can pursue reforms and build a coalition for the future. "We don't have any expectations of accomplishing legislative change in one year," he told *Current*. Starr's new associate director is Karen Conner, a former freelance public radio producer who last year served as communications director for the AFL-CIO Building Trades Organizing Project.

CIPB will aim to restructure pubcasting "as an independent public trust, so as to give it the financial security it needs to have greater editorial independence." The group's second "primary objective" will be to "empower community groups to help democratize local public broadcasting



*CIPB Board member George Gerbner signs declaration at press conference.*

### **Campaign leaders sign declaration of pubcasting independence**

*Later article originally  
published in Current, Nov.  
29, 1999*

With C-SPAN's camera watching Nov. 16, leaders of the new Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting signed a "declaration of independence" that begins: "We hold these truths, as stated by the Carnegie Commission reports on public broadcasting. to be

stations"--a major calling for Starr in recent years. As a resident of the Pittsburgh area, he has led an ongoing watchdog campaign critical of the past and present managements of WQED-FM/TV--its former focus on national production, its financial problems and governance, and its long-delayed attempt to get out of debt by selling its second public TV channel, WQEX. Starr's forthcoming book is *Public Television in the Public Interest: How to Make Public Television Accountable in Your Community*. CIPB aims to insulate pubcasting from interference from both business and government. "The American people need and deserve space in our vast system of communications that is not controlled by the imperatives of power or profit," according to the proposal for CIPB.

The group proposes to replace CPB with a new Public Broadcasting Trust, endowed adequately by congressional appropriation to spend \$1 billion a year on public TV and radio. This would more than replace the present \$300 million appropriation to CPB, plus nearly as much donated by corporate underwriters. Corporations could make contributions for general support but not for specific programs, and the underwriters would receive only brief acknowledgements on-air. The trust would be backed with an endowment from taxes on communications companies, such as taxes on spectrum auctions or station sales.

Instead of being run by CPB's board of presidential "political patronage appointments," who have "not been consistently protective" of pubcasting's mission, Starr said, the trust would be overseen by a nine-member board appointed in several ways: three appointed by reps of public broadcasting, three by education and two by the President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities. PBT's managing director would be the ninth trustee and would be elected by the other eight.

Details of the nominating process have not been worked out, Starr said. CIPB started with a proposal drafted a decade ago by the Working Group for Public Broadcasting organized by former newspaperman and CPB program executive John Wicklein, Starr said. Though CIPB leaders bring various populist and left critiques of pubcasting, they appreciate the value of its achievements and its

self-evident . . ." [Text.]

"The time has come to return public broadcasting to its mission to serve as a town hall of the air and a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard," said Jerry Starr, CIPB executive director. CIPB's aims to stimulate a grassroots movement urging Congress to permanently endow a trust fund to aid public TV and radio--replacing annual appropriations through CPB.

Public TV today practices "self-censorship that would not be tolerated in any other journalistic endeavor," said longtime producer Alvin Perlmutter, a member of CIPB's board. Almost every public TV producer has at some point withheld certain program ideas because they could endanger funding, he said. Signing the document along with Starr and Perlmutter were board members George Gerbner, a prominent communications researcher now at Temple University, and Janine Jackson, program director of the media watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

Gerbner, who contends that people communicate most effectively through fiction and nonfiction storytelling, said society is distorted because most of the stories

extensive infrastructure. In contrast, some younger critics of the system have given up on it and put their hope in the Internet, public access cable, or other new technologies. That's okay for them, Starr said. "But I would never want to abandon the wonderful resource already available to us. The laws are on the books. To me, it's the most interesting place to start."

Starr began discussions that led to CIPB at the Media & Democracy Congress in 1996 and held an organizing meeting at the second Congress, two years ago. Willis became involved at that point, and Moyers expressed interest after seeing a CIPB proposal, Starr said.

Most members of CIPB's Board of Directors have criticized pubcasting's centrist and middle-class ways: Starr; Nolan Bowie, senior fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Daniel del Solar, an independent producer who previously managed Philadelphia's WYBE-TV and once was CPB's training director; Temple University Prof. George Gerbner, a major figure in TV/violence research who founded the Cultural Environmental Movement media reform group; and Janine Jackson, program director of the progressive media watchdog Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

Also: former FCC commissioner and University of Iowa College of Law Prof. Nicholas Johnson; longtime public TV producer and Moyers colleague Alvin H. Perlmutter; and filmmaker/lecturer Barbara Trent, producer of the Oscar-winning "Panama Deception" (1992), "Coverup: Beyond the Iran-Contra Affair" (1988) and other documentaries.

A broader assortment of academics and media people serve on CIPB's National Advisory Committee. Some are longtime producers for public TV: Danny Schechter, co-founder of Globalvision and co-producer of *Rights and Wrongs: Human Rights Television*, and former *New York Times* man Hedrick Smith, producer of six PBS primetime series. Others, like Smith, are former newspapermen active in journalistic issues: former Berkeley journalism dean Ben Bagdikian; prominent ex-newspaperman Bill Kovach, who now runs the Nieman fellowships at Harvard; and John Wicklein, a former CPB programming executive. Included are a present station chief and a former one: Wick Rowland, president of KBDI, Denver, and former communications dean at the University of Colorado; and Jack Willis, ex-president of KTCA, Twin Cities.

Also on the advisory panel are: pubcasting historian Robert K. Avery, FAIR founder and

are told "not by someone who has stories to tell, but has something to sell."

Without independent funding--a permanently endowed trust fund is proposed by CIPB--public broadcasting will "sink deeper and deeper into the tar pit of commercialism," predicted former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson, talking via speakerphone from the University of Iowa, where he teaches law.

Will CIPB be politically viable with its "left-leaning" leadership? asked Sasha Samberg-Champion of *Public Broadcasting Report*. Starr rejected the "left-leaning" characterization, and said CIPB is seeking a wider range of on-air opinion from both left and right.

"What we're talking about would open the doors to all voices," said Perlmutter.

Fox News pundit Jeff Cohen, Howard University communications dean Jannette Dates, prominent author/social critic Barbara Ehrenreich, communications attorney and minority media specialist David Honig, and *Public Television for Sale* author William Hoynes of Vassar College.

Also: Nancy Kranich, president-elect of the American Library Association and specialist on freedom of information; University of Illinois Prof. Jerry Landay, a former ABC and CBS correspondent; Edward McClarty, academic and former chair of the California Public Broadcasting Commission; and psychiatry professor and race relations expert Alvin Poussaint.

CIPB opened offices last month in downtown Washington: 1029 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: (202) 638-6880. Fax: (202) 638-6885.

### Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting's

## Declaration of Public Broadcasting Independence

We hold these truths, as stated by the Carnegie Commission reports on public broadcasting, to be self-evident.

- that "public broadcasting create programs primarily to serve the needs of audiences, not to sell products or to meet demands of the marketplace."
- that "public broadcasting has a responsibility to use these most powerful communications media as tools to enhance citizenship and public service,"
- that the mission for public broadcasting is to serve as a "forum for controversy and debate" and "a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard" so that we could "see America whole, in all its diversity."

We therefore commit ourselves to this campaign to reform public broad casting as an independent public trust in service to all people of this nation.

Alvin Perlmutter  
Janine Jackson  
George Gerbner  
Jerry Starr

# Current

November 15, 1999  
Vol. XVIII, No. 21

## Trust campaign launches with foundation backing

**W**ith backing from progressive foundations, a new national campaign to roll-back government and corporate control of public broadcasting will go public this week in Washington, D.C.

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"The American people need and deserve space in our vast system of communications that is not controlled by the imperatives of power or profit," according to the proposal for CIPB.

The group proposes to replace CPB with a new Public Broadcasting Trust, endowed adequately by congressional appropriation to spend \$1 billion a year on public TV and radio. This would more than replace the present \$300 million appropriation to CPB, plus nearly as much donated by corporate underwriters. Corporations could make contributions for general support but not for specific programs, and the underwriters would receive only brief acknowledgements on-air. The trust would be backed with an endowment from taxes on communications companies, such as taxes on spectrum auctions or station sales.

Instead of being run by CPB's board of presidential "political patronage appointments," who have "not been consistently protective" of pubcasting's mission, Starr said, the trust would be overseen by a nine-member board appointed in several ways: three appointed by reps of public broadcasting, three by education and two by the President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities. PBT's managing director would be the ninth trustee and would be elected by the other eight.

Though CIPB leaders bring various populist and left critiques of pubcasting, they appreciate the value of its achievements and its extensive infrastructure. In contrast, some younger critics of the system have given up on it and put their hope in the Internet, public access cable, or other new technologies. That's okay for them, Starr said. "But I would never want to abandon the wonderful resource already available to us. The laws are on the books. To me, it's the most interesting place to start."

Starr began discussions that led to CIPB at the Media & Democracy Congress in 1996 and held an organizing meeting at the second Congress, two years ago. Willis became involved at that point, and Moyers expressed interest after seeing a CIPB proposal, Starr said.

Most members of CIPB's Board of Directors have criticized pubcasting's centrist and middle-class ways: Starr; Nolan Bowie,

senior fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Daniel del Solar, an independent producer who previously managed Philadelphia's WYBE-TV and once was CPB's training director; Temple University Prof. George Gerbner, a major figure in TV/violence research who founded the Cultural Environmental Movement media reform group; and Janine Jackson, program director of the progressive media watchdog Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

Also: former FCC commissioner and University of Iowa College of Law Prof. Nicholas Johnson; longtime public TV producer and Moyers colleague Alvin H. Perlmutter; and filmmaker/lecturer Barbara Trent, producer of the Oscar-winning "Panama Deception" (1992), "Coverup: Beyond the Iran-Contra Affair" (1988) and other documentaries.

A broader assortment of academics and media people serve on CIPB's National Advisory Committee. Some are longtime producers for public TV: Danny Schechter, co-founder of Globalvision and co-producer of *Rights and Wrongs: Human Rights Television*, and former *New York Times*man Hedrick Smith, producer of six PBS primetime series. Others, like Smith, are former newspapermen active in journalistic issues: former Berkeley journalism dean Ben Bagdikian; prominent ex-newspaperman Bill Kovach, who now runs the Nieman fellowships at Harvard; and John Wicklein, a former CPB programming executive. Included are a present station chief and a former one: Wick Rowland, president of KBDI, Denver, and former communications dean at the University of Colorado; and Jack Willis, ex-president of KTCA, Twin Cities.

Also on the advisory panel are: pubcasting historian Robert K. Avery, FAIR founder and Fox News pundit Jeff Cohen, Howard University communications dean Jannette Dates, prominent author/social critic Barbara Ehrenreich, communications attorney and minority media specialist David Honig, and *Public Television for Sale* author William Hoynes of Vassar College.

Also: Nancy Kranich, president-elect of the American Library Association and specialist on freedom of information; University of Illinois Prof. Jerry Landay, a former ABC and CBS correspondent; Edward McClarty, academic and former chair of the California Public Broadcasting Commission; and psychiatry professor and race relations expert Alvin Poussaint.

CIPB opened offices last month in downtown Washington: 1029 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: (202) 638-6880. Fax: (202) 638-6885.

—Steve Behrens

# THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING REPORT®

The Authoritative News Service for Public  
Broadcasting and Allied Fields

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**CPB/ANNENBERG CHANNEL GETTING DOUBLED FUNDING:** Service will be made 24/7 and will cover humanities as well as math and science. MathLine seen to need different direction. (P. 3)

**SHVA NEGOTIATIONS NOT FINISHED:** At our deadline, bill included donor list trade restrictions, but didn't have salary cap reinstatement. Webcasting questions among issues holding up measure. (P. 4)

**FCC REQUIRING HIGH BURDEN OF PROOF FOR SINCLAIR DTV PETITION,** MSTV conference is told. Must-carry debated. New timetable sought. (P. 5)

### Trust Plan Offered

#### CITIZENS FOR INDEPENDENT PUBLIC BCSTG. DEBUTS WITH STARR AT HELM

Citizens for Independent Public Bcstg. (CIPB) recognizes that quest for industry trust fund is "long process," Exec. Dir. Jerrold Starr said at Nov. 16 news conference to announce organization's establishment in Washington. He gave more details on how trust fund could be operated, while not committing to specific funding proposals. Starr and other board members presented familiar rationales for removing govt. and business influences from public broadcasting (PBR April 9 p4). Their belief is that fear of offending corporate and govt. funders drives many programming decisions by PBS, and that CPB's govt.-appointed board also serves to keep system in check.

CIPB has 2 "major funders," Starr told us: Open Society Institute, headed by former public broadcaster Jack Willis, and Florence and John Schumann Foundation, run by PTV documentarian Bill Moyers. Without giving specific figures, he said funders have been "generous" and have made multiyear commitments of "enough for us to do all the things" CIPB has planned. Organization does "want to diversify" funding, Starr said.

Although he originally advertised exec. dir. position for someone else to fill, Starr told us Willis and Moyers looked over applicants and said Starr himself would have to take job if he wanted their groups to back him. He said he now is commuting weekly from home in Pittsburgh, where he first became involved in industry challenging sale of WQED's second station WQEX, and is on leave from teaching position at W. Va. U. CIPB is running behind its earlier expectation of July debut. Also with organization at beginning is Assoc. Dir. Karen Conner, formerly communications dir. for unit of AFL-CIO. CIPB is operating out of 3-room suite at 1029 Vt. Ave. in Washington, allowing it ready access to "folks who do similar work," such as Benton Foundation and Media Access Project, Conner said. News conference was held at Benton hq.

Industry would need "at least \$1 billion" annually, in addition to money it gets from states, Starr said. He said corporate contributions "would be welcomed" but only "briefly acknowledged," comparing public broadcasting with opera, where he said contributors "don't tell the conductor what to play." CIPB is "evaluating proposals" for acquiring that money and "hopes to come up with something that's fine-tuned" before presenting it, Starr said. He said ideas in play include 2-5% tax on TV ad revenues, with 2% levy producing \$1 billion annually. It also is possible to tap into "large surplus" of federal govt., he said.

In White Paper distributed at event, Starr proposed 9-member Public Bcstg. Trust to replace CPB as distributor of federal funding and also operate PBS and NPR satellite systems. Trust would have board of 3 public broadcasters, 3 educators, 2 arts and humanities representatives and managing dir. selected by other 8 members, with members serving staggered 6-year terms. Half of trust's funds would be used to commission, produce and distribute programs that would be offered free to PTV stations. Other half would be passed directly to stations for program production and acquisition, allowing far more local programming, it said. Trust would be accountable to Congress and Administration, with General Accounting Office conducting biennial financial audit and Congress holding hearings every 10 years to update enabling legislation. That legislation isn't likely next year, Starr admitted, but he told us later that "we're not here to make a splash and run."

Arguments that industry is too commercial "aren't new," acknowledged Sunrise Media Chmn. Alvin Perlmutter, who also is CIPB board member, but he said they take on new significance as PTV sees more competition in traditional strongholds such as educational and nature programming. More than ever, major part of PTV's purpose should be controversial journalism and documentaries, Perlmutter said, but "present environment discourages this." He said it has "become evident that certain projects are not being funded... When a corporation puts money into a program, it does so for its own reasons." Perlmutter wouldn't give specific examples, but said "almost every producer or station has not followed through on ideas" because of funding pressures. Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) Program Dir. Janine Jackson agreed that public broadcasting must have "not just creative and entertaining content" but "political content," area from which it "appears to be retreating." FAIR sponsored study this year by Vassar Prof. William Hoynes that concluded that business interests have large and growing share of PTV's public affairs programming (PBR July 2 p6). Starr said industry has made "concessions" since Republicans took over Congress in 1995.

Also not new are efforts for trust fund, Starr said. He said prior attempts have failed because of powerful NAB lobby, "timid politicians" and "divided public broadcasting community." However, "we're hopeful"

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that time has come for idea, he said, based on bills introduced in Congress by Reps. Tauzin (R-La.) and Markey (D-Mass.), Gore Commission recommendation and study showing that public would support levy on commercial TV once it knows broadcasters don't pay for spectrum. CIPB's main purpose will be "to mobilize that sentiment," Starr said. He said tactics would include lobbying stations to include more diverse programming, rather than attempting to influence PBS choices.

Starr said he has supporters in public broadcasting, most of whom don't want to be known yet. He said trust fund issue is one on which industry "doesn't speak with one voice," with stations in large markets perhaps benefiting from moving away from noncommercial mission, while situation facing smaller stations would be "disastrous." There's "a lot of pressure to circle the wagons," Starr acknowledged, but "look who we've got with us — to me, that's the best of public broadcasting." CIPB has 8 board members, with others including former FCC Comr. Nicholas Johnson, Harvard U. Senior Fellow Nolan Bowie, Solar Imaging's Daniel Del Solar (former gen. mgr. of WYBE-TV Philadelphia and KALW(FM) San Francisco and former CPB staffer), Temple U. Prof George Gerbner, Empowerment Project co-Dir. Barbara Trent. It also has 17 members of National Advisory Committee, including Willis, Hoynes, KBDI-TV Broomfield, Colo., Pres. Willard Rowland, Minority Media & Telecom Council Exec. Dir. David Honig — who is representing opponents of sale by WNED-TV Buffalo of its 2nd station WNEQ-TV (see separate note, this issue) — FAIR Founder Jeff Cohen and several journalists, academics, producers.

Starr isn't only CIPB member who has won public disfavor from some in public broadcasting. WNED-TV Pres. Don Boswell had criticism for Honig that was similar to that voiced by WQED Pres. George Miles for Starr this summer. "It's unfortunate that these people aren't at stations trying to run stations," Boswell told us. "They don't understand new technology." He said Honig and his colleagues shouldn't block stations from dealing with financial problems and then not help them with solutions.

Starr disputed notion that CIPB is left-leaning group, saying he doesn't "think those labels are useful." He said CIPB's "call for pluralism [is] something we all can respect." Perlmutter said there always has been notion "that PTV was liberal," but there "always [has] been an effort to reach out to conservative voices." Starr said he believes his ideas can find resonance even for GOP members of Congress. Pointing to "angry sentiment" over industry's list-swapping practices this summer, he said problem stemmed from public broadcasters' being "under enormous pressure" to raise money. It's "disingenuous of the same people forcing them" to find new revenue sources "to reprimand them" for doing so, Starr said.

PBS "obviously would welcome a trust fund", spokesman said in response to CIPB's proposals. "We have supported that position for years." He had no other comment.

## MathLine Seen To Need 'Change'

### **CPB/ANNENBERG CHANNEL SWELLS TO \$14 MILLION PROGRAM**

CPB and Annenberg Foundation are pumping more money into CPB/Annenberg Channel, turning it into 24-hour/7-day-per-week service and expanding teacher development subject matter to humanities as well as math and science. CPB is doubling funding to \$5 million per year over next 5 years, Annenberg \$9 million annually, and both have option to renew for additional 15 years. Channel also will be developing workshops and video series for teachers — similar to MathLine activities. That raised questions for some about future of MathLine, which also has seen enormous funding increases in last 2 years, and Channel Dir. Scott Roberts acknowledged he was in discussions with PBS as to how programs can best complement each other. At Nov. 16 announcement to CPB board, officials said CPB/Annenberg expansion also is well-timed to fill PTV stations' need for multicasting content.

CPB/Annenberg Channel now reaches 43,000 schools, more than 40% of those in U.S., Roberts said, as well as 21 million households through cable. It currently runs for 60 hours per week. Channel is offered free to educators, unlike MathLine material, which in some cases costs hundreds of dollars. It was praised recently by Dept. of Education Technology Dir. Linda Roberts, and CPB/Annenberg's Roberts said his channel may get additional funding from Dept., where program "has a lot of connections." It wasn't clear from where in budget CPB would be taking money for its enlarged contribution. Vp-Education Peggy O'Brien wasn't available to answer question.

"The MathLine service is going to have to change some," Roberts told us. He said CPB/Annenberg has grown "just so big, so well-used by schools nationwide... so much larger than MathLine ever was." Roberts



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## Is Corporate Influence Shaping the PBS agenda? Two New Organizations Push for Change

Tamara Straus, Original to AlterNet

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has never lacked for criticism. It was created in 1967 with the ambitious mandate to "provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard," serve as "a forum for controversy and debate" and broadcast programs that "help us see America whole, in all its diversity." But PBS has been accused, year in and year out, of failing to captivate a wide enough audience, and of kowtowing to the cultural tastes of elites, of producing safe, dull and unoriginal programming.

By its own account, PBS today is on the upswing. Four years after congressional leaders accused PBS of "exhibiting a liberal bias" and threatened to "zero out" public television, the nonprofit corporation is in good stead with its federal funders. Congress has approved a \$50 million annual increase for PBS (up to \$300 million), something that hasn't been done since 1995. Moreover, according to its 1998 annual report, PBS has repositioned itself as a "modern media enterprise," financially secure with a high-tech educational outreach program and a sophisticated Web site.

Yet, as many media watchdogs, labor, environmental and women's organizations see it, the real story behind PBS' financial health has less to do with federal funding, media savvy and Web-driven public support than with its increased dependence on corporations. Organizations such as Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting and the Media Education Foundation say PBS has caved to corporate interests, letting multinational corporations like Mobil and General Motors -- as well as conservative foundations like John M. Olin, Lynde and Harry Bradley, and Sarah Scaife -- underwrite programs that are a far cry from the diversity of opinion that was PBS' original mandate. For these media watchdogs, the cost of survival for PBS has meant the expansion of five-second underwriting acknowledgments into 30-second commercials, a dwindling number of public affairs programs critical of industry and government, and an increase in business news shows that cater to the few Americans actively involved in the buying and trading of stock.

"Public broadcasting routinely covers our society from the top down (government and corporate officers and Wall Street investors), but almost never from the bottom up (workers, consumers and those concerned with the environment)," said Janine Jackson, program director of the New York-based Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting. Jackson and her organization, FAIR, have become active in two new coalitions that are demanding

public broadcasting reform -- the Feminist Coalition on Public Broadcasting and the Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting (CIPB).

The first, the Feminist Coalition on Public Broadcasting, has brought together 30 feminist, progressive groups and individuals that include: Susan Faludi, Gloria Steinem, Barbara Ehrenreich, the National Organization for Women, the Feminist Majority Foundation, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and labor, black and Latino grassroots community organizations. The Coalition is protesting what they see as the epitome of PBS' move to the right: a recent anti-feminist "gender wars" documentary series funded largely by conservative foundations (as well as by PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a congressionally funded nonprofit organization), filled with inaccuracies and peopled by experts and hosts with ties to the same organizations that paid for it.

The three-part documentary, which aired in April as part of PBS' "National Desk" public affairs series, featured episode titles such as "The War on Boys" and "Title IX & Women in Sports: What's Wrong With This Picture?" and stated that efforts to achieve gender equity had created "a time bomb ticking at the foundation of society." In other words, that women's rights could be advanced only by a "retreat" on the part of men.

In one episode, "Politics & Warriors: Women in the Military," Walter Williams, an economist, contended that "mental differences between men and women" cause "ladies" to be "nicer" than men and therefore less fit for military service. Yet Williams is neither a biologist nor a sociologist. He is a fellow at the Olin Foundation, which funded the "National Desk" series, and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, which is supported by Olin, as well as the Bradley and Scaife foundations, the series' other source of nonprofit support.

Another expert who appeared in the series, Kimberly Schuld, is associated with the conservative Independent Women's Forum, which again is funded by Olin, Bradley and Scaife. Schuld insisted that statistics prove girls are not typically interested in sports, although she never mentioned the source of the statistics, which seem odd in a year that the U.S. won the Women's World Cup.

Beyond the financial and ideological connections between the series and its experts, the Feminist Coalition has found it galling that the episode "Title IX & Women in Sports" contained inaccuracies, such as the misidentification of Title IX as part of the Civil Rights Act (it was passed as part of the Education Amendment of 1972 to prevent sex discrimination in federally funded educational programs) and the claim that Title IX has not been applied to the classroom.

"This National Desk series was riddled with inaccuracies about gender equality research and programs, propagated by people who have been discredited repeatedly by scholars and others over the years," said David Sadker of American University's School of Education and a Feminist Coalition supporter. "In airing these distortions and

inaccuracies, PBS has compromised the results of 30 years of exhausting studies undertaken by researchers such as myself on behalf of students."

On November 9, Feminist Coalition members met with PBS officials to question why PBS aired a series that presents an "anti-woman, anti-feminist perspective packaged by PBS as impartial journalism" and to urge them, among other things, to create a single set of programming guidelines in order to maintain its journalistic integrity. PBS officials, falling back on their mandate language, countered that the series was designed to spur debate.

"We present different programs with different points of view all the time," Tom Epstein, PBS vice president of communications, told the Boston Globe. "We do not take orders from ideological special interests on what to air," he continued, suggesting that the grantees and supporters of the Olin, Bradley and Scaife foundations do not represent ideological special interests, but members of the Feminist Coalition do.

"PBS is very interested in pitching this as a left versus right battle," said Jennifer Pozner, Women's Desk director of FAIR. "But this isn't about the left versus the right. This is about journalistic integrity. This is about putting the public back on public TV. This is about creating a mechanism for journalistic guidelines. How could these funding elements be allowed to sway programming so strongly?"

Pozner said that PBS' rightward bias is illustrated by its selection of documentary programs. Among PBS' recently rejected shows was "Defending Our Lives," an Academy Award-winning documentary about domestic violence that was not aired because one of the producers was the leader of a battered women's support group and PBS felt that gave her a "direct vested interest in the subject matter of the program." Also rejected was "The Money Lenders," a film about the World Bank, which PBS did not show because it was concerned that "even though the documentary may be objective to some, there is a perception of bias in favor of poor people who claim to be adversely affected."

Coming to the aid of the Feminist Coalition's critique of PBS is a new nonprofit, the Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting (CIPB), which was formed last month in Washington, D.C. Funded by the Soros and Florence and John Schuman foundations and backed by journalistic heavies like Bill Moyers and Hendrick Smith, CIPB is out to empower community groups' hold on their local public television programming and -- more ambitiously -- to abolish the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, replacing it with a permanent Public Broadcasting Trust, independent of corporate and government influence.

"Production and programming on PBS are driven by where the funding is coming from instead of by concept or mission," said Jarold Starr, CIPB's executive director. "The Public Broadcasting Trust would effectively ban corporate underwriting and allow PBS to return to its mission to serve as a town hall of the air."

Starr believes an intolerable situation has developed where there are nightly or weekly shows available for those interested in business and Wall Street investing, but no regular program for those whose concern is human rights, workplace issues, consumer affairs, or environmental protection. Like most in the PBS reform movement, he insists that the sole public, non-commercial venue for television is being overwhelmed by commercial forces and that PBS must be saved from becoming a handmaiden to big business and the ideological platforms of a few wealthy foundations.

Starr says there are several forces of change these days that could make the PBS trust fund a reality. He points out that in 1998, House Telecommunications Subcommittee leaders Billy Tauzin and Edward Markey designed a bill (which was later withdrawn) for a permanent PBS trust fund and that the Gore Commission on the social responsibilities of digital broadcasters strongly recommends that Congress create such a trust. A December 1998 poll by Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates also found that 79 percent of the American public favors a proposal to require commercial broadcasters to pay 5 percent of their revenues to support public broadcasting programming, something that would give the trust, which CIPB envisions should have at least \$1 billion annually, the funds it needs to remain independent.

Starr and CIPB board directors, who include Alvin Perlmutter, the Emmy award-winning documentary producer, Nolan Bowie of Harvard University, and Janine Jackson of FAIR, also make it clear that PBS officials may be at the end of their rope regarding funding conflicts. In CIPB's press release former PBS President Bruce Christensen is quoted as warning that unless the funding problems get solved, public broadcasting "will become a commercial medium in the next century."

As part of its campaign, CIPB plans to organize local chapters, which will seek to influence the programming of their public broadcasting stations. "We'll be going after educational organizations and environmental groups, unions, civil rights organizations, women's groups, and arts and cultural organizations -- everyone who has a common interest in seeing PBS as a tool for civic life," said Starr, who added that part of the problem of influencing PBS at a grassroots level is that people "don't know how the system works." CIPB is in the process of developing a training manual, workshops, an interactive Web site and instructional videos.

At the end of the day, Starr and fellow reformers insist PBS must ask itself "who public television is for." Although as PBS' Tom Epstein put it, "We present different programs with different views all the time," Feminist Coalition members and CIPB supporters believe that "different" has become a euphemism for "what the market will allow."

"The increasing commercialization of the system suggests that the public-as-citizens approach is taking a backseat to the public-as-market model at the 'new PBS,'" argued William Hoynes, a professor of sociology at Vassar College who works with FAIR and is on CIPB's advisory board. "Public television can be a valuable democratic resource if its

leadership takes seriously its founding mission to broadcast programs that include fresh perspectives, expand dialogue, welcome controversy and serve all segments of the public."

The question is, can PBS do all this and remain dependent on corporate and foundation support?

For more information on how to join the reform PBS movement, please contact Citizens for Independent Broadcasting: 1029 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 800, Washington DC 20005; Tel: 202-628-6880. CIPB's Web site will be up in January at [www.freepubcasting.org](http://www.freepubcasting.org).

Also, for more information on the Feminist Coalition and its fight to increase the views and representation of women, people of color, gays and lesbians and other public-interest groups on PBS, go to <http://www.fair.org/feminist-coalition.html>.

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# PATROLLING THE AIRWAVES

*Two new activist groups lobby for public accountability from broadcasters.*

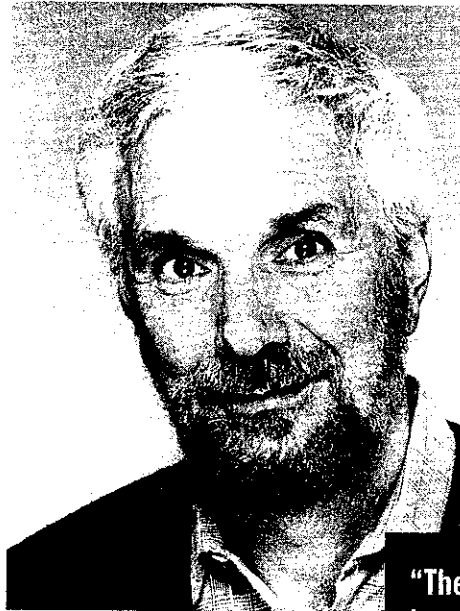
BY PAT AUFDERHEIDE

TWO ORGANIZING PROJECTS, CITIZENS FOR Independent Public Broadcasting (CIPB) and People for Better TV (PBTv), both backed with Open Society Institute (OSI) funds and based in Washington D.C., are pushing broadcasters for more diverse programming and public accountability.

CIPB [www.cipbonline.org], launched in November, targets public broadcasting and calls for a massive overhaul of its sprawling structure. "The time has come to return public broadcasting to its mission to serve as a town hall of the air and a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard," says CIPB director Jerry Starr, a professor and activist.

The organization calls for the top-to-bottom restructuring of public broadcasting, centered on creation of a national trust with a non-partisan board. Half the trust's funds would go for national radio and television production and distribution; local stations would get the other half. Coffers would be filled by taxing profits of corporate media. A special fund for experimental and independent production is also envisioned by the group, though not yet elaborated on. The Carnegie-funded commission that first designed public broadcasting recommended a national trust, but lawmakers instead made public television dependent on Congressional appropriations and corporate and individual donations. Organizers say this wreck-and-rebuild agenda will be fueled by an initial grant from OSI and the Schumann Foundation of \$175,000 to date and by grassroots activism, through local chapters of CIPB and of its coalition partners.

Can public broadcasting, with its decentralized structure and welter of invested bureaucracies, be so massively reorganized? Trust proposals have recently been floated in Congress, by Republicans eager to get public television out of the annual budget, but G.O.P infighting has sunk them. "Unless the Democrats take over the House, chances are low," says one Congressional insider. However, Democrats in control of the House might want to take up the



trust proposal option, if only to force Republicans to take a public stand against a popular service.

Certainly viewers care about public television. "There are a goodly number of \$25 donors who are upset at commercialization," says public interest media lawyer Andrew Jay Schwartzman. Protests and complaints from upset viewers are a constant of PBS programmers. A recent attack on PBS' programming judgment, coordinated by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), mobilized 33 prominent individuals and groups, including the National Organization for Women, into the ad-hoc Feminist Coalition of Public Broadcasting. The coalition denounced PBS for several right-of-center, conservative-funded programs that allege feminism has been bad for American society, produced by the six-hours-a-year series National Desk. The ardently ideological series entered the mix of core PBS public affairs programming in the wake of the 1994 anti-public television push of Republicans.

The Feminist Coalition met with PBS staffers to demand that PBS ascribe to a single set of journalistic programming guidelines and boost its airtime for feminist subject matter, producers, and on-air talent. PBS spokesman

Tom Epstein says that the organization was "following up on their comments" but had "come to no conclusions yet" and that the service "does not take orders from ideological interest groups."

"We need grassroots action to make stations more responsive to what their whole community wants, not just its wealthiest and most conservative elements," says Robert Richter, independent producer and AIVF treasurer. *Father Roy: In the School of the Assassins*, Richter's documentary on the recently-closed School of the Americas, benefited from grassroots pressure, eventually showing on 140 public television stations.

PEOPLE FOR BETTER TV, WHICH SINCE APRIL HAS been coordinating about a million dollars of OSI money, focuses on the obligations of commercial broadcasters. Since 1996, all broadcasters have had free access to new spectra to transmit digitally, without clear public interest obligations. PBTv [www.bettertv.org] housed in the Washington, D.C. offices of the Civil

**"The time has come to return public broadcasting to its mission to serve as a town hall of the air and a voice for groups in the community."**

**CIPB director Jerry Starr**

Rights Forum, includes major labor, educational, religious, and ethnic organizations. Local chapters of its constituent organizations in eight cities petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to set guidelines for the use of digital spectrum, and in December the FCC opened an inquiry. Under Commission Chair Bill Kennard, however, the FCC has shown itself timid to confront regulation-averse Republicans. PBTv national coordinator Mark Lloyd says public broadcasters and indies could benefit: "If commercial broadcasters have to provide funds to meet their public interest obligation, maybe they ought to give them to public broadcasters."

"Public TV stations have always complained that they didn't have enough money for production, and they didn't have enough spectrum," says Jack Willis, the OSI consultant who funded both CIPB and PBTv. Willis created such public affairs programming as *The 51st State* in public TV's early days and later headed Minneapolis station KTCA. "They won't have

either of those arguments as an excuse not to do local programming and not work with independents, if these initiatives work."

Veterans of earlier battles see both potential and problems. "We could do anything we wanted to, if we had a mass movement to do it—but how do we do that?" asks Lawrence Daressa of California Newsreel, one of the activists who worked to create ITVS. "We haven't been able to mobilize a broad public around media reform up until now." Earlier efforts around media reform, for instance in the late 1920s and in the 1960s and 1970s, were unable to create broad grassroots support.

"Surely we need something that's going to give a wider scope to media advocacy," says



George Stoney, the godfather of cable public access, "but the history is not encouraging." Media reform efforts with more targeted strategies have, however, won affirmative action gains, reserved spectrum and channel space, airtime for educational kids' shows, production funds for independents, and even ITVS and the minority consortia.

"Some kind of public accountability, even if it's weak, means the public can get its foot in the door," says Gordon Quinn of Kartemquin Films, who is working with PBTv. "If there's no accountability, they won't ever talk to you."

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