

# TV News Hustlers, Hucksters, and Hypes

As an alternative paper, the Vanguard will regularly examine the competition in "Media Watch."

By Joan Taylor



"Dead man lives! Film at eleven!"

That, in the parlance of television, is a typical "tease" sandwiched between commercials in the prime hours of viewing which is geared to make you look at the local television news broadcast at eleven o'clock each weeknight.

It illustrates the inane lengths to which television stations go to rob your attention and rape your mind.

In any critical review of television news, it is important to separate network television from local television. At the network level, there still seems to be a desire to inform, educate and expand on some developments which have significance.

But, at the local level, there are no Cronkites, Chancellors or Reasoners.

The local "anchorman" in Los Angeles, as an example, are a collection of itinerant television gypsies, warmed over male models, has-been radio announcers and token minorities who worry more about how to find hair spray and makeup than how to craft a news story.

Beginning at the top of the dial, let's sketch the local tv news menu:

Channel Two has imported a vacuous motorcycle buff named Patrick Emory from St. Louis who looks like a dressed up Li'l Abner. His style is a mixture of boredom and indifference, a style which finally puts viewers in the same frame of mind. Emory works with a co-author named Sandy Hill who gives the impression that she's always auditioning for a Breck commercial. Miss Hill is unbelievably pretty, but she is also pretty unbelievable. Channel Two's top "anchorman" is Joseph Benti who tries to mask his disgust of the circus around him with forced dignity. However, the end result gives Benti the appearance of discomfort, as if he is in a constant need to go to the bathroom.

Channel Four is still floundering after the loss of Tom Snyder, who grabbed all the local television news ratings with his combination of impishness, irreverence and arrogance. Paul Moyers, the Rich Little of TV anchormen, was plugged into Snyder's slot, where he's tried to carry on by copying Snyder's appearance, Snyder's mannerisms, Snyder's style. But, where Snyder projected an image of really being concerned about local events, even if he was swimming in ignorance, Moyers leaves the impression that he's a lost little boy talking about grown-up affairs.

Channel Four, however, also deserves some credit. It employs Jess Marlow, a solid professional journalist who has not only built up a loyal following among viewers, but is also one of the best liked men inside his own shop and profession. NBC is also grooming anchorman Warren Olney, another rarity: a professional journalist who has a good style and appearance on the tube. The Channel Four stable

is rounded out by John Schubeck who has bounced from NBC Burbank, to ABC New York, to ABC Hollywood to NBC Burbank... which may be his last media bounce. John is in law school and is expected to hang up his hair spray can soon and opt for a career in law.

Channel Five seems to have gone out of the news business. After years of experimenting with large staffs, KTLA is down to a token staff. Larry McCormick does the early news and former George Putnam sidekick Hal Fishman is the station's main anchorman. The almost humorless Fishman still has his gloom and doom delivery, but lacks the sting of a Putnam.

Over on the Channel Seven lot, there's change in the wind. The main anchor team consists of Jerry Dunphy and John Hambrick, but there are rumors that Dunphy may be teamed up later with Christine Lund.

Dunphy is still smarting over the way he was dumped by Channel Two, but some of his anger must be melting in view of Channel Seven's rating picture going up. The real "victim" of the Dunphy acquisition by Channel Seven was John Hambrick, who has been forced to slow down his style to accommodate the easy going Dunphy. Hambrick has taken a lot of lumps from critics in Los Angeles, but the fact remains that he's one of the few anchormen in town who writes much of his own news and understands what he is writing.

Channel Nine is the last refuge of George Putnam who, for years, has had the exclusive West Coast distributorship on patriotism. George is still doing his 'thing' on Channel Nine, but fewer people watch him.

Metro News, Metro News on Channel Eleven has to be the biggest joke in town. Charles Ashman, he of Ashman File, is the featured lip-flapper, but it's the format which is gross, gross. Following Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman, it's hard to tell where Mary leaves off and Ashman begins. The opening of Metro News, Metro News leads off with unabashed sensationalism which would make William Randolph

Hearst blush. If it's not homosexuality, prostitution, adult book stores or massage parlor news, you aren't tuned to Metro News, Metro News.

This leads us to Channel Thirteen where Hugh Williams has been in hiding for several years. With very little film, very few visuals, no national film and sparse production, Channel Thirteen is obviously trying to satisfy the Federal Communications Commission and not Los Angeles viewers.

What does it all mean?

It means that the two-million-dollar-a-year newsrooms operated by the network stations, KNST, KNBC and KABC, are more interested in style than substance—for the most part. At independent stations such as KTTV, management is trying to use shock, schlock and sensationalism in place of responsible news gathering in an effort to snare viewers, while at stations such as KTLA and KCOP there is no serious effort to compete at all.

For the viewer in search of real information on television it is a perilous journey around the dial. KCET, the local educational station, doesn't program daily news, and that is a local tragedy. KCET does not have the pressures of advertisers, the pressures of ratings, the pressure of station managers toying with news in order to make personal reputations.

Don't look for the commercial stations to alter their policies. News is big business... but, only if it gets rating points. And to achieve rating points the commercial stations are looking only for pretty faces and fast moving visuals to make newscasts attractive.

It is significant that inside the TV newsrooms of Los Angeles, the men and women who put the programs together call them "shows," not newscasts.

That's why fire, murder, rape and barricaded men are more important to local news than poverty, injustice and drought.

Local television news needs a kick in the ass. Its impact on the public is so profound and its own management so cavalier that it needs outsiders looking over its shoulder, constantly reminding it of its ethical, moral and professional responsibilities.

## DWP

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endorsed the CAUSE program. Nevertheless he ended up lobbying among his counterparts for the increases. "Half a loaf is better than no loaf," he said referring to the reduction to the seniors and the Blue Ribbon Committee.

The package didn't impress the consumer activists at all. To the end the CAUSE organizations—especially the seniors who in many ways lead the coalition—remained united in pushing for a lifeline for all residential users. "Why should we be happy about an effective 38% increase," said Ed Novikoff of Seniors for Political Action, "when all we get is a token plan for a few seniors and a vague promise for the future. This plan is clearly designed to pit seniors against other hard-pressed con-

sumers." CAUSE had drawn up a proposal for the rates which would have granted the DWP the revenue increases they sought by shifting the burden of payments toward the big users.

Ironically two weeks prior to the DWP increases the views of CAUSE had found acceptance on the state level. The Public Utilities Commission approved a rate increase for northern California's Pacific Gas & Electric with the stipulation that Lifeline rates be provided for the basic needs of the residential consumer. A week later Governor Brown signed legislation that will establish the Lifeline for the investor-owned utilities of the state. But the municipally-owned DWP, which is not regulated by the PUC, is not bound by those actions.

In November the Los Angeles Blue Ribbon Committee was established. Although there were several outstanding public representatives on the committee when it was first announced, there was but one grassroots consumer. The committee is heavily weighted with white, male professional types. CAUSE was especially enraged because there was not one representative of CAUSE, the organized consumer movement, or any environmental groups. Before being ejected from the Council hearings, I had personally been promised a place on the committee by a top Bradley aide, but, I found out, the Mayor personally interceded to block my appointment. Representatives of CAUSE attended the first meeting of the Blue

Ribbon Committee and startled the comfortable grouping by charging that the Mayor had undercut its credibility by its limited composition. The chairperson of the committee, John Phillips of the Center for Law in the Public Interest, promised to urge the Mayor to add a CAUSE representative. A week later Howard Stover of Peoples Action Union was chosen to represent us.

Stover summarizes the CAUSE position on rates: "The basic questions of rates are political rather than technical or economic. Small consumers of all sorts are being ripped off by the DWP and that has to end. Equally serious is the fact that the DWP rates encourage waste and needless growth. We now need conservation

rates that place the burden of growth on those who demand it and recognize the right of people to the basic amount at a reasonable price. We need a Lifeline."

CAUSE is still expanding its organizational support for the program and building a base of activist units in every Council district in the City. The successful campaign to defeat the \$600 million Arco Alaska gas surcharge, plus this effort, have welded the political unity of a broad group of interests—seniors, consumer groups, environmentalists, labor organizations, and political groups. We aim to make reform of the DWP a major issue in the municipal elections next year.



## Citizen Intelligencer

By Burt Wilson

### California's Nuclear War

One of the biggest election battles since reform Governor Hiram Johnson brought the initiative process to the people of California is shaping up over the "Nuclear Safeguards" initiative on the June 8th primary ballot.

The issue is clear: is nuclear technology safe enough for us to plunge ahead into dotting the California landscape with those atomic domes? Ralph Nader, a number of prominent scientists, and various consumer and environmental groups say no. Nader calls the whole nuclear power industry "professionally insane."

On the other hand, the power companies, the banks, and especially all the corporations which have anything to do with constructing atomic power plants say everything's A-OK, and they'll trot out Dr. Edward Teller, the "father of the H-Bomb", to tell you so.

This isn't going to be your run-of-the-mill initiative. This is hard ball. Not millions, but trillions of dollars are at stake and big business is expected to open its pocketbook wide enough to split the seams. Former Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown is the organizer of the ex-checker. He and other pro-nuclear people have put together an outfit called "Citizens for Jobs & Energy" (CJE) to spearhead the campaign against the initiative. They're funded mainly by such giants as Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric, Westinghouse and the Bechtel Corporation. All the power companies involved have nuclear reactors. Westinghouse manufactures reactors. Bechtel builds the plants. The high-powered political PR firm of Winner and Wagner has been hired by CJE to handle the campaign against the initiative.

So far, two well-laid strategies have backfired. First, a number of prominent Jewish leaders and newspaper publishers were prevailed upon to push the line that nuclear power was needed to make the US independent of Arab oil blackmail and people should therefore vote against the initiative. This campaign was barely underway when it was discovered and exposed in the national media that various subsidiary companies of the Bechtel Corporation had for a number of years been supporting the Arab boycott of Israel. End of that campaign!

Next, LA City Councilman Art

Snyder, a consummate politician who knows where the money is, tried to push through a resolution opposing the initiative. The plan was to get the council on record against the initiative so a paragraph to that effect could be included in the pro and con mail-out material that goes to voters in the sample ballot package.

Pro-initiative forces, however, discovered the tactic and prevailed on enough councilpersons to delay any vote until after the State Energy Commission announces its recommendations sometime near the end of March — well after the deadline for written ballot arguments.

Fifteen other states have similar nuclear safeguards initiatives coming up for a vote in the November elections. Those initiatives are there because Ralph Nader and Ed Koupal, executive director of People's Lobby, organized the "Western Bloc," a group pledged to go into every state which had the initiative process on the books and get the nuclear issue on the ballot. Their success was a monumental job of citizen action.

California is where the big money pro-nuclear forces are concentrating since both sides know that as California goes, so goes the nation. If the nuclear initiative passes, it would bring the entire nuclear industry to a screaming halt nationwide. It would force a rampaging network of corporations to make, and prove, nuclear power safe before constructing any more plants — to deal now with the problem of radioactive waste material instead of using the people as human guinea pigs.

A lot of money will be spent by the nuclear industry to try to convince us that atomic power plants are safe, that they'll solve all our energy needs and bring thousands of jobs to California. A tremendous amount of pressure will be brought to bear on public officials to support this view. The bait is hefty campaign donations in this election year. It helps to know where the money is, where it comes from and who it might be influencing. To find out, you might want to get a copy of "The Nuclear Web," a graphic guide to California's interlocking pro-nuclear family. It's devastating. Send your request, name and address to People's Lobby, 3456 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90019.

If you're going to be in a war, you might as well know who your enemies are.



## FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Have you ever heard of "exporting" pollution? Well, it's a fact: To get around their own nations' clean air and water regulations, some businesses move factories and operations to countries where labor is cheaper and governments are less cautious about environmental protection. We're glad to report, however, that a recent United States court decision on the proposed Darien Gap highway — a U.S.-funded roadbuilding project that would cut through the jungles of Panama and Colombia — may help put an end to some of this particular brand of international finagling.

The ruling (which marks the first time a domestic court has considered the effects of a U.S. enterprise overseas) says that the Darien Gap project must conform to United States regulations, even though the highway will not be built in this country. In other

words, the road has been stopped until a required environmental impact report is prepared, filed, and approved.

And once that statement is compiled, it will (or at least it should) point out a factor that may be the project's final undoing: road construction in the area planned will cause the cultural extinction of that region's nomadic Choco and Cuna Indians.

For centuries, the Chocos and Cunas have coaxed a bare existence from the jungle by clearing a patch of land, planting mixed crops there for a season or two, and then moving on (which allows the depleted soil to "rest"). The highway would bring in new people and more development, which would limit both the availability of potential cropland and the Indians' necessary freedom to move around. The result of the new "stability"? Bye-bye Indians. Goodbye soil.

As it stands today, the court's decision applies only to federally funded projects... but it's a step in the right direction. Friends of the Earth is working toward the day when no industry will be allowed to rip off another culture or country for the sake of profit.

### NUCLEAR NEWS: THE HOT ATOMIC CONTROVERSY

The "nuke" battle is heating up as quickly as a runaway reactor... especially in California, where voters will decide in June on a nuclear safeguards initiative. If passed, the measure won't necessarily ban atomic-based power (even though industry spokesmen are making claims to the contrary), but it will require that the state legislature determine (1) whether or not nuclear plants are safe, and (2) if the

existing limits on liability insurance should be continued or abolished. (If a serious reactor accident were to occur today, victims would recover only pennies on every dollar's worth of loss... and a good many people want that situation changed.) Petition drives for similar nuclear post-ponement measures are now underway in the states of Maine and Oregon.

Our best hope right now is a bill that has been introduced in Congress by Representative Phillip Burton of California. The measure — which would provide enough money to purchase the watershed land surrounding vulnerable areas of the preserve — would result in a bigger and more stable Redwood National Park, set aside and protected for all of us to enjoy. A letter in support of the bill, directed at your Congressman, would certainly help.

### CALIFORNIA'S REDWOODS: DEAD WOODS?

Conservationists have been saying so all along, and now the federal government has officially agreed for the first time: Logging around California's Redwood National Park is wrecking the sanctuary.

A two-year study of the area by a team of United States Geological Survey scientists concluded that increased erosion has toppled 1,000-year-old redwoods and caused the siltation of fish-bearing pools. (Private surveys financed by the lumber companies argue that most of the damage is the result of natural forces... but frankly, we don't believe them.) Loggers have left piles of litter — tires, heaps of gravel, cut logs, battered culvert pipes, and steel cables — all over the park. And what can be done about the damage?

## BETWEEN THE LINES..

By Jim Horwitz

COMMON CAUSE IS MOVING ON OTHER CALIFORNIA ISSUES besides campaign spending reform. They include: opening up the records of the legislature and Governor's office to the public. Changing the two-thirds vote requirement in the legislature to a simple majority to enact taxes on banks and corporations. Opening the Assembly/Senate conference committee meetings to public scrutiny. Establishing an independent reapportionment commission which can operate objectively.

## Kissinger to Resign Soon

### KISSINGER TO RESIGN SOON:

New information made available by Washington Watch suggests a new reason for an expected early resignation by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The crucial news is that Kissinger has committed perjury, an actual legal crime, not just a contempt citation by Congress, which of course is serious enough. In the suit by Dr. Morton Halprin, former Kissinger aide on the National Security Council, against Kissinger for wiretapping Halprin's private telephone, there is now sworn testimony of Kissinger's perjury in denying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he did not authorize the taps. Criminal perjury plus public knowledge of Henry Kissinger's direct involvement in the assassinations

of Chilean leaders Rene Schneider and Salvador Allende, can only add to resignation at an early opportune moment.

SYNDICATED COLUMNIST JACK ANDERSON will soon be releasing some personal data on the presidential candidates that has normally been classified. Anderson asked each candidate to submit to him a medical report and the last five years of their Federal income tax returns. No matter what response Anderson gets, he's bound to learn something of interest about all of the candidates. Failure to respond might raise questions more interesting than those that are divulged from the tax returns and health reports themselves.