

# The PBS and CPB Memoranda:

By John Carmody

A pair of "confidential" memos now circulating among the nation's public broadcasting executives provide the hardest evidence yet that public TV is about to get still another major overhaul.

At issue is the status of Public Broadcasting Service, the so-called "network" for the nation's 232 public TV stations.

PBS officials are sure that a "position paper" prepared by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting means

PBS is being ordered out of business. The network thinks the present staff of 120 could soon be cut in half, leaving the network with only an engineering function.

A corresponding memo issued by PBS states strongly that the network should continue its concern of the last three years: running public TV. CPB in that time has served mainly as an administrative unit.

The two papers were issued earlier this month to the boards of directors of the two groups. The brief, legal-

sounding documents followed several weeks of tough negotiations between CPB's John Golden and Tom Gherardi and the network's Gerald Slater and Norman Sinel, who also wrote the memos. Golden and Slater are No. 2 men in their respective organizations; Gherardi and Sinel are attorneys.

In the balance is what the public will see over public TV in future years. PBS in just three years has attracted a growing audience that now numbers 40 million, using a

## Is the Writing on the Wall?

"mix" of public affairs, drama and children's fare.

The presidentially appointed CPB board, now strongly attuned to the Nixon administration, wants public TV out of public affairs, or at least down from the 30 per cent a week set out now by PBS. This is a key part of the conflict.

But, according to a network official, something besides politics is at stake. "The CPB board has a lot of powerful men on it," Hartford Gunn Jr., president of PBS, pointed out sev-

eral months ago. "They'd like to have the fun of running a network themselves. It isn't all ideological by a long shot."

The punchy, 16-paragraph CPB memo states flatly that only the corporation has responsibility to Congress for programming, scheduling and funding any "network" functions. CPB, says the memo, is also responsible for the "strict adherence" to "objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature."

By inference, the memo suggests that the PBS network and even its board of directors, with its 12-man majority of public TV station managers, exists only at the sufferance of the federally funded corporation.

The five-page PBS memo, on the other hand, spells out its basic responsibility to those public TV stations, and its "unwillingness to delegate . . . policy and decision-making functions to any organization not under direct station control." PBS, says its memo, would like to hammer out

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a "coherent and precise division of functions" between the two groups.

CPB officials refuse to comment either on their own strongly worded memo or on the PBS position paper. PBS executives, fighting for their corporate lives, are a little less cautious.

Henry Loomis, the tough-minded Nixon administration appointee who took over CPB in October, says flatly that he thinks "a gentleman's agreement" made verbally between himself and Gunn on Dec. 15, was

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to have kept the memos top secret, at least until the boards of directors of both groups can discuss them at their early January meetings, scheduled here. Originally, the memos were circulated only to the 15 members of the CPB board and the 19-member PBS panel.

When the station-manager oriented PBS board received copies of the memos last week, however, they realized the CPB was about to take over a network which had given them popularity back home never enjoyed in the 20-odd years or so of educational TV, fondly remembered as the "great unwatched." Some have reportedly been circulating copies of the memos to supporters around the country.

Earlier this week, Loomis met with another branch of the educational TV establishment. In Chicago, he told eight board members of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters' educational television service that station managers would have some kind of "input" in whatever form the new network would take.

"He said there will still be a 24-hour interconnection," one board member reported. At Loomis' request they declined to discuss details until after the board meetings.

The crux of the problem, and the two "positions" stated separately in the memoranda, goes back to 1968, when CPB was formed by Congress to administer the 1967 public broadcasting act.

John Macy Jr., the first corporation president, set up the PBS to serve the growing "interconnection" of educational TV stations, which now number 232 outlets. PBS' position now is that the act prohibited CPB from operating a network and that the alternative was "legal."

Macy permitted PBS to set up a strong programming section and a regular schedule of evening, prime

time fare—in effect a "fourth network."

Under Macy the Corporation served mainly as the "housekeeping unit," passing on the yearly congressional appropriations to the stations and PBS, but generally not interfering with day-to-day program decisions.

Over the last several years, however, increased criticism has come from the Nixon administration and Congress about some of the program content permitted by PBS. Meanwhile, PBS yielded to strong NAEB pressure and gave station managers a growing voice in program decisions—partly in response to administration criticisms which suggested local political viewpoints were being ignored by the Eastern-oriented PBS.

In June, President Nixon vetoed a \$45 million authorization bill for Macy's CPB. Shortly thereafter, Loomis replaced Macy and Mr. Nixon strengthened the CPB directors by naming former Rep. Tom Curtis, a strong advocate of educational as against controversial "public affairs" programming, as board chairman.

Loomis soon realized that the real "power" of public broadcasting resided in the L'Enfant Plaza suites of PBS, and in their basement engineering offices which "interconnect" the network.

Last month, reversing a three-year practice, the CPB board issued the final deci-

sions on network programming for the 1973 schedule. Although it approved PBS' professional staff choices in drama and children's fare, it vetoed most of PBS public affairs standbys, including William F. Buckley Jr.'s "Firing Line" and "Washington Week in Review."

Only last fall 140 station managers voted these as the two most popular programs for their constituencies.

In place of a strong public affairs-news agenda, CPB officials reportedly would stress programs for the elderly and other special groups as well as regionally produced shows on topics of local interest. Regardless of who wins the final battle, both CPB and PBS programmers will be faced not only with a decoining federal authorization this year (expected to drop from \$15 million in fiscal 1972 to \$13.5 million next year) but a steady 10 per cent annual inroad of inflation in TV producing costs.

PBS saw the handwriting on the wall and asked to "negotiate" the current memoranda before additional network functions were bypassed by the CPS board.

Thus on Jan. 5, a PBS board with perhaps no legal sanction will discuss the memos. Five days later, a CPS board with political and legal clout will, too.

Network and NAEB officials believe they will eventually have to take their fight to Congress. They have already launched a campaign to fight back—which is why those memos aren't as "confidential" as before.

## Media Control?

United Press International

Amid growing criticism that the Nixon administration was seeking to censor broadcast media, White House telecommunications policy director Clay Whitehead said yesterday that his proposals were aimed at helping television better serve the local community.

"The courts and the FCC have been moving more and more in the direction of deciding what's good for broadcasting," Whitehead said. "We would like to change that, to look at it from the eyes of the community."

Whitehead was interviewed on the NBC "Today" show.

Meanwhile, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wa.) said he would offer legislation making it clear that the constitutional guarantees of a free press apply to the broadcast media.

Proxmire said that Whitehead's proposals "can be interpreted in no other way than as a threat to freedom."

"If it were merely a threat to broadcasters it would be one thing," Proxmire said. "But this could very well be a threat to the public's right to know what is happening in this country."