

Burt Wilson

Remaining public control of airwaves threatened

The Communications Act of 1934 affirmed that the airwaves belong to the public and those who use them should operate in the public interest. But Congress will soon be considering a bill that would turn over the public airwaves to private broadcasting interests completely.

The legislation, HR-13015, dubbed the Communications Act of 1978 in order to give it instant importance, is authored by Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin (D-Calif.), Chairman of the House Communications Subcommittee. The bill is intended to be monumental—both in its scope and as a tribute to Van Deerlin's service in Congress.

Significantly, neither the public nor the broadcasting industry was involved in drafting this potential landmark legislation. It arrived on the congressional scene after a year's preparation during which time few outside of Van Deerlin's office knew what was going on.

Why change the law now? Van Deerlin's office offers the excuse that the 1934 act is "too vague" as to government standards concerning the "public convenience and necessity" under which broadcasters have been operating and that it's time now to let "market forces" determine the future of the airwaves.

In short, it means a wholesale sell-out of the public interest to capitalist forces.

On the surface, HR-13015 appears to treat both public and private interests equally. Henry Geller, former Chief Counsel for the Federal Communications Commission and now President Carter's advisor on telecommunications, has called the bill "courageous legislation." Indeed, certain sections hit private interests hard while others appear to promote the public interest. But observers say the true test will come during the bill's two-to-four year journey through the congressional labyrinth where the trade-offs will have a tough time surviving intense lobbying from powerful broadcasting interests.

Central to the legislation (and the basis on which the entire bill should be opposed) are provisions to turn over radio and TV frequencies to the broadcasters who now are merely licensed to use them.

Radio broadcasters, for example, must currently go through a license renewal

process every three years and their privilege of operating on a frequency can be challenged by the public. HR-13015 would grant radio stations a license-in-perpetuity. Such a license would be subject to a petition for revocation at any time, but only on criminal grounds such as fraud, running a lottery or using foul language. The broadcasters would not be held accountable to the public interest.

If HR-13015 passes, the U.S. will be the only country to abdicate complete control of the public airwaves to private enterprise.

New applications for radio stations would be selected and awarded by a vague "lottery" system, eliminating competitive hearings.

TV broadcasters would be granted five-year licenses for two terms and after ten years would receive a license-in-perpetuity. They, too, would be subject to petitions for revocation, but neglect of programming would not be deemed sufficient cause.

Sec. 434 of the legislation mandates that TV stations would be obligated to present news, public affairs and local programming "throughout the broadcast day," but critics of the bill say this will be the first clause to bite the dust in the trade-off stage.

One of the more frightful sections reads that broadcasters would have to treat controversial issues in "an equitable manner." Charles M. Firestone, director of the communications law program at UCLA, says, "What they want to do is trade the Fairness Doctrine for a so-called 'equity principle,' but the rewrite conveniently doesn't define that principle."

Appearing at a recent government-sponsored seminar on the bill in Hollywood, Firestone blasted the legislation as "giving away the airways to existing licensees and not maximizing the public's First Amendment interests."

"This bill could affect all of our rights for many, many years to come," Firestone pointed out. According to his analysis, HR-13015 is extremely faulty because:

- broadcasters would not be held accountable to the public;
- it eliminates the ascertainment process;
- there are no guidelines for equal employment opportunities, minority and

Another jarring provision of the bill would allow AT&T to get into the common carrier business in return for a divestiture of its Western Electric affiliate. Critics see the raw power of AT&T as muscle enough to exert an immediate dominance in that industry and effectively eliminate all competition.

One of the most interesting sections of this proposed new Communications Act of 1978—and the one with the most potential for abuse—is Sec. 351 (4), which reads: "The flow of information transmitted across national boundaries should not be restricted by any nation, except to the extent necessary to protect its national security and the personal privacy of its citizens."

Sound familiar? It's the old Nixon dodge—justifying censorship in the name of "national security"—meaning the government can prevent any information it wants from reaching the public.

There's much more. But it's best to write one's representative for a copy of the bill while voicing a concern about the push being assembled to steamroller it through.

It's important that the public not be left out of the debate on this issue. Curiously, even the private sector is having problems. In a recent meeting of critics of the bill in Los Angeles, actress Kathy Nolan, a member of the prestigious Carnegie Commission on Public Broadcasting—a private commission that is fond of bypassing and excluding its critics—said, "We're being frozen out!"

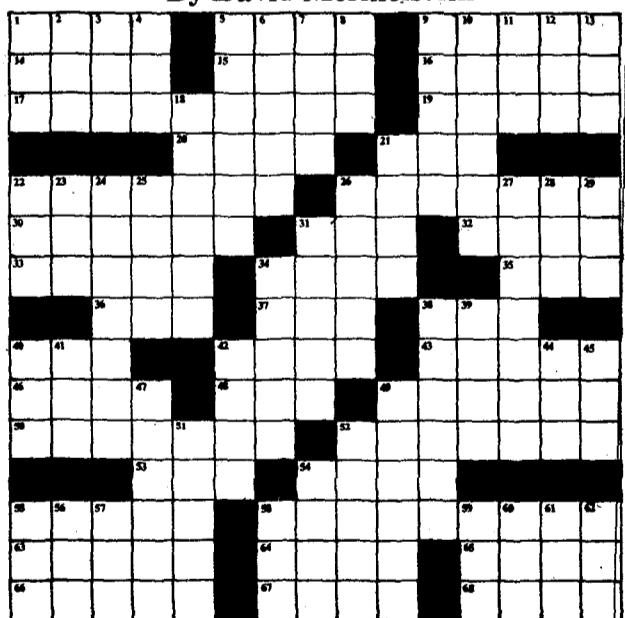
Opposition to the bill is being coordinated by the Telecommunications Consumer Coalition, 256 Washington St., Mt. Vernon, NY 10550. Also, the National Citizens Communications Lobby, 1028 Connecticut Ave., Washington, DC 20036.

If HR-13015 passes, the U.S. will be the only country in the world to abdicate complete control of the public airwaves to private enterprise in the name of democracy.

Burt Wilson is chairperson of the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and a member of the National Task Force for Better Broadcasting.

Who am I? (No. 1)

By David Mermelstein



Across:

- 1 Fuss
- 5 Applaud
- 9 FATHER OF 17 ACROSS
- 14 Bard of _____
- 15 Seek's partner
- 16 Tube, game or Hebrides
- 17 '71 Oscar winner
- 19 Requires
- 20 Falsehoods
- 21 East German initials
- 22 BAREFOOT SCREEN HUSBAND
- 26 SCREEN LOVER, AND FAMILY
- 30 Stroke
- 31 Egg layer
- 32 Leap or quinoctial
- 33 Bard jobs
- 34 _____ of tears
- 35 Baseball stat.
- 36 Ottoman governor
- 37 A collection

- 38 Prefix for metric or bar
- 40 Kind of rule
- 42 Scent
- 43 Laors arduously
- 46 _____de-sac
- 48 Battle of Hastings date minus LXIV
- 49 Seasickness
- 50 WHERE 26 ACROSS CAME HOME FROM
- 52 PLAYWRIGHT PLAYED BY 17 ACROSS
- 53 Nixon's Ziegler
- 54 Pen name of Viaud
- 55 BROTHER OF 17 ACROSS
- 58 HUSBAND OF 17 ACROSS
- 63 Kind of roller
- 64 Author of *A Death in the Family*
- 64 Music halls
- 66 Warfare units
- 67 Wartime ally of U.S.A.
- 68 OFFICER SCREEN HUSBAND

Down:

- 1 _____ Mahal
- 2 Gametes
- 3 CO-STAR IN '71 FILM, TO FRIENDS
- 4 *Uno's* English equivalent
- 5 "Bare, ruined _____"
- 6 Assembled (with up)
- 7 Does arithmetic procedure
- 8 Pod unit
- 9 Asian language
- 10 '70s issue
- 11 Birmingham, as seen from Mobile: Abbr.
- 12 Accountant's color
- 13 Relative of wks.
- 18 Downy
- 21 Past
- 22 New G.I.: Abbr.
- 23 Corn form
- 24 Basketball term
- 25 Precedes covert or sole
- 26 Pertaining to the soft palate
- 27 Valor
- 28 Something picked up
- 29 _____ Lanka
- 31 SITE OF CONTROVERSIAL VISIT BY 17 ACROSS
- 34 FORMER HUSBAND OF 17 ACROSS
- 38 Its capital is Roma
- 39 Type of flood
- 40 Magna Carta date minus CX
- 41 Answer to *monsieur*
- 42 Asian gulf
- 44 Grassland
- 45 Clemente or Jose
- 47 Winning or losing
- 49 Lying beneath the earth's surface
- 51 Standards
- 52 Tepees, e.g.
- 54 Oregon sights
- 55 Wintertime in L.A.
- 56 Airport abbr.
- 57 Pin number
- 58 Greek letter
- 59 Hebrew letter
- 60 Followed HST
- 61 Suffix for auction or profit
- 62 No-no gal, for: ort

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*The premier issue provides an analysis of the NCLC and the *Information Digest*. Fall, 1977.

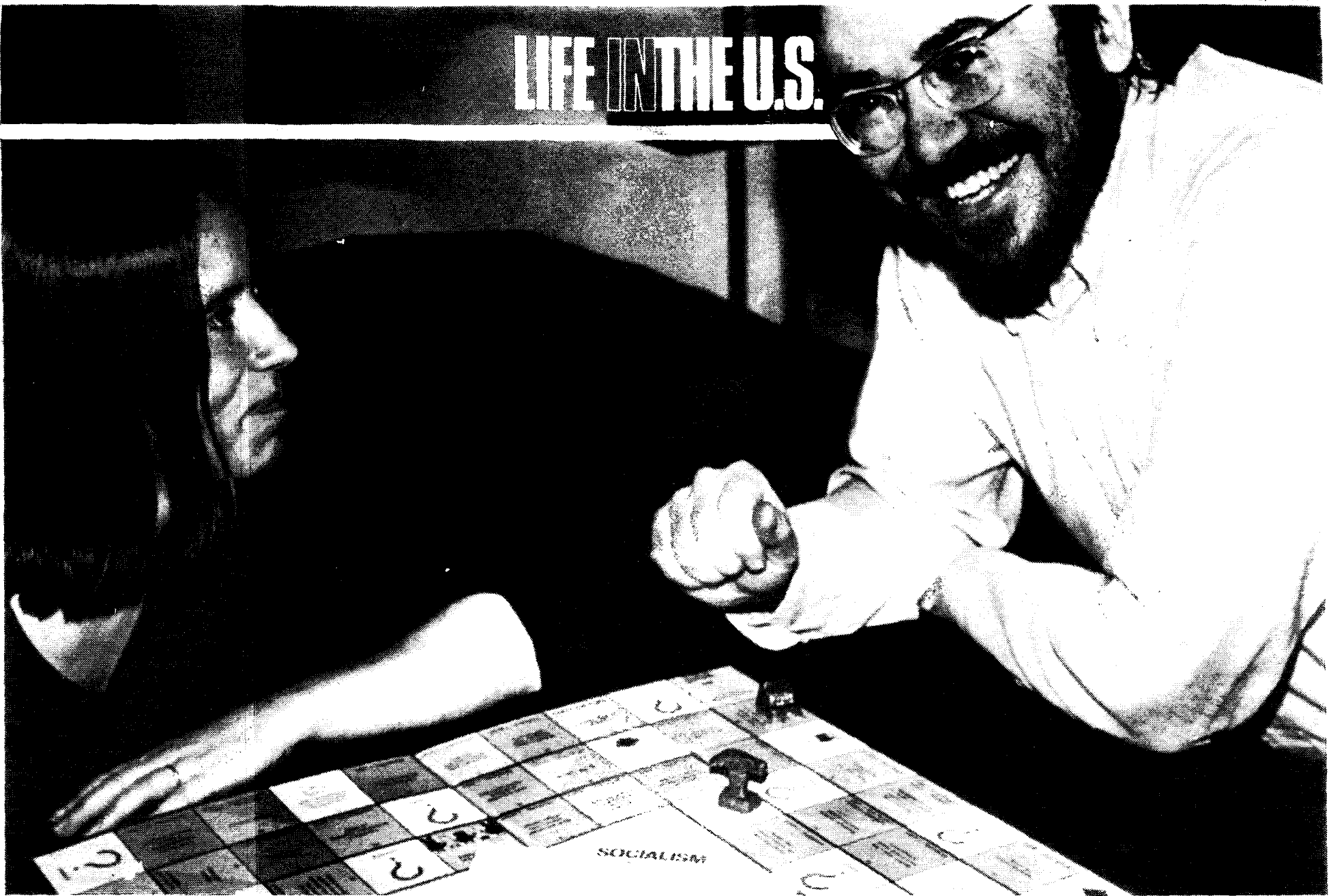
*Vol. 1, No. 2 concentrates on COINTEL-PRO, surveillance of anti-nukes, and the national police computer network. April, 1978.

*Vol. 1, No. 3 looks at the "new" right. July, 1978.

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LIFE IN THE U.S.

Paule and Bertell Ollman playing *CLASS STRUGGLE*.

GAMES

Class Struggle is good clean fun

Using the marketplace and a popular format, Ollman has launched an ironic form of Marxist education.

The legend of the new game *Class Struggle* spreads. The inventor—Bertell Ollman, professor of politics at New York University and author of the highly respected book *Alienation: Marx's Concept of Man in Modern Society*—devoted seven years to perfecting his creation. Since last May, when he started selling it, the game has gained an international reputation. The first 5,000 copies have sold out and 25,000 more are being printed.

The game's impact has only begun. It's been successfully tested in numerous classrooms. A Socialist Party study group testified that they learned a great deal from playing it. Major bookstores that never before handled games now display it in windows next to novels and scholarly books. Italian and German firms are negotiating for marketing rights in Europe.

Why is there so much interest in an American game of class-struggle when so little talk of class struggle goes on in American life? One answer is that the game is ingenious, original, and entertaining. It takes political cliché and represents it in a colorful, engaging manner. Using the business world's marketplace and a format derived from mass culture, Ollman has launched an ironic form of Marxist education to disseminate socialist thought.

In readable language, the game makes clear the nearly invisible class forces that create everyday life. This is no mean task, given the academic character of Marxism in America. The game's popular presentation of class struggle is rich in humor and optimism as well as hard reality.

One chance card for the Capitalist class has the rich man's daughter insisting on

eloping with the garbage man, so the upset capitalist misses a turn wondering what he'll tell the neighbors.

More seriously, the game's rules acknowledge the superior position of the capitalists, and they are given certain advantages. Capitalists go first, and they can assign to Workers the distracting task of handing out plus and minus points, the assets and debits accumulated in the game by each side.

Chance cards and board squares allow Capitalists their full array of control devices—sexism and racism, drugs, spectator sports and mass education.

The Workers are rewarded for fighting back. They gain assets by forming trade unions, organizing rent strikes, setting up an independent political party and uniting around issues of race and sex.

As an introductory course on Marxism designed as a board game, *Class Struggle* is openly and palatably didactic. Individual players play not for themselves, but rather as representatives of a class. The two major ones, Capitalists and Workers are supplemented by four minor ones—Farmers, Small Businesspeople, Professionals, and Students. Alliances between classes are helpful in amassing points and winning the game. Only the Capitalists or the Workers can win the game. The minor classes can win only in alliance with one of the two major classes.

A chance throw of the dice determines who will represent what class, much the same way our birth determines what class we'll become part of. With class identities set, we're ready to wind our way through the 84 squares leading to the last of six major confrontations, Revolution!

Rolling the dice, playing the game.

I played *Class Struggle* twice with Ollman. Both times, his throw of the dice made him the Capitalists, while both times I was the Workers. We first played with the Beginners' Rules, and then went on to the Full Rules. The most complex rules offer more subtle analyses of class strategies and alliances, with increased penalties

and rewards for pursuing victory.

In our first game, Ollman won by only one point, considered a narrow victory. The game attempts to reflect the differing degrees of historical dominance of one class by another. There are smashing victories and narrow defeats.

In the second game, I was determined to win for the working class. Paule Ollman and her sister represented the four minor classes, and neither would ally with me. The minor classes operated quite independently of the two major ones, and for a while it looked as though they would accumulate more assets than either of us, and like the regime of Napoleon III in France, by-pass Capitalists and Workers and seize the state.

One of the most interesting moments was when Paule Ollman explained why she (as the Farmers) refused to ally with me (the Workers). Seeing the world through the eyes of an independent producer, she decided she did not want to live in a socialist workers' state. This projection of real consciousness is encouraged by the game. Her decision hurt both of us. It weakened the Workers as well as the Farmers.

Initially, I fell far behind after a bad run of the dice, but after rolling double after double I caught up with the Capitalist marker, just three steps short of the ominous skull-and-crossbones square, Number 81, Nuclear War. There we were, Workers and Capitalists, breathing down each other's necks. Ollman told me that if he shot a three, he'd land on Nuclear War and blow up the world, ending the game. Sure enough, up came a three, and it all ended suddenly.

In a way it was frighteningly appropriate, since the minor classes refused to strengthen the position of the Workers and Capitalists who were running neck-and-neck. Only the ruling class can use nuclear weapons, and it is required to use them if the Capitalist marker lands on 81. If the Workers get there first, they prevent the Capitalists from initiating a holocaust for the rest of the game.

The dramatic end of the game raised some provoking questions and debate among us. I felt that the rules concerning 81, Nuclear War, made the end too mechanical. Nuclear war is a last-resort, drastic and desperate act. The ruling class has many intermediate means of control, from TV to the job market. The secret of its domination lies in the invisibility of its class-repression. Nuclear war should not be automatic; it should be permitted only after a number of conditions have been met.

Also, there is a tendency in the game to portray class struggle in a linear fashion. We go from turn to turn, adding assets and subtracting debits. Yet, real class struggle is a conditional back-and-forth movement. Each event conditions the shape of the next phase, while itself being conditioned by what came before. The one-by-one collection of pluses and minuses gives class struggle an incremental character and deemphasizes the conditional quality of advances and setbacks.

The game could be strengthened by making more of the situations "conditional"—if workers set up their own newspaper, they would be in better position to finance a radio station, and if they had a radio station, then when the confrontation over elections occurred they could elect more of their own representatives.

Ollman has included a number of linked situations that allow flexibility in the making of class alliances, and enable the chance cards to offset each other's advantage. When Workers occupy a factory, they force the Capitalists to miss a turn; when Capitalists successfully use red-baiting, they gain an asset to save for a future confrontation. More of this would be good.

Ollman welcomes criticism in the refinement of the game. The intelligence behind his original conception has already made *Class Struggle* an ingenious aid in the spread of socialist thought. How far can it go? Here is tongue-in-cheek square 82: "Government orders the destruction of all copies of dangerous game *Class Struggle*." It may be too late, however. ■