

## COMMUNICATIONS

# New communications act draws fire

By Ron Williams

CHICAGO

**S**TRONG OPPOSITION TO THE proposed "Communications Act of 1978" surfaced at a day-long public hearing at Chicago's Dirksen Federal Building Aug. 22. The session, chaired by Rep. Martin Russo, Illinois member of the 15-person House Communications Subcommittee, saw the bill draw fire from a broad range of community groups representing women, consumer, ethnic, minority, religious and media reform interests.

The controversial 217-page bill, HR 13015, authored by Subcommittee chair Lionel Van Deerlin (D-CA) and senior Republican Louis Frey Jr. of Florida, is intended to overhaul the Communications Act of 1934.

The Communications Act of 1978 would revise all facets of the billion-dollar telecommunications industry: television (cable, UHF, VHF), radio and common carrier (telephone and related services). If the bill became law in its present form, sweeping changes would result in every sector.

Central to the legislation is the intention of only permitting federal regulation "to the extent marketing forces are deficient." In Van Deerlin's words, "Where possible, we're going to be trying to get the federal government out of the business of regulation."

To this end, the act rejects the principle of public ownership of the airwaves and eliminates existing standards that require the license holder to operate in the "public interest, convenience and necessity." In virtually every area that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) now regulates, the new communications commission would be prohibited from intervening.

In place of the current three-year renewal procedure for broadcast licenses, stations would be granted licenses "indefinitely," which would be revoked only if the holder violated the law.

## Industry applauds deregulation.

This legislative move towards deregulation was welcomed by a number of those who testified. The words of William Hanson, general manager of radio station WJOL AM, Joliet, Ill., were typical: "As a radio broadcaster, I am generally pleased with the deregulation philosophy of HR 13015. It would go a long way toward getting the federal government out of the radio business and would benefit not only the industry, but also the public that we serve."

"The longer license term, the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time provisions, and the other good provisions of the bill will allow me to spend more time on programming, more time on serving my community and less time filling out federal paperwork," he stated.

Stewart Hoover, executive producer of the Church of the Brethren's Broadcast Ministries opposed deregulation and argued that "marketplace forces" cannot be relied on to serve any interests save those of the industry.

"The bill's reliance on the marketplace to insure public service seems to be based on the old idea of the law of supply and demand. That might be all right if the public were the 'consumers' of broadcasting, but we're not. The public is the product broadcasting produces. Advertisers are the customers, and they already benefit from the extremely efficient service from broadcasting. The problem is that the needs and interests of the public—which is the product—get lost in the shuffle."

While most corporate broadcasting interests such as RCA and ABC appear to be cautious in their praise of the new act, the National Radio Broadcasters Association (NRBA), a splinter group of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), has enthusiastically endorsed the



Rep. Martin Russo, Illinois member of the House Communications Subcommittee, chaired the Chicago hearing on the Communications Act of 1978. Over 60 people spoke during the one-day session.

## Corporate ownership would replace public airwaves, but opposition may force the bill to be rewritten.

legislation.

At the hearing a NRBA spokesperson "heartily endorsed the philosophy underlying the proposed rewrite," but echoed commercial broadcaster's misgivings concerning the proposed "spectrum fee." Commercial operations would pay spectrum fees, based on audience size and frequency use, that would be used to underwrite the costs of the new Communications Regulatory Commission, promote minority ownership of stations and provide public broadcasting programming grants.

The NRBA called the fee-schedule "a very dangerous concept" and stated "we do not feel a concept that is potentially so coercive should be embodied in the statute." In the inevitable lobbying and trade-offs expected during House and

Senate action, the spectrum fees are likely to be the target of the broadcast industry's formidable lobbying clout.

### Whittling away affirmative action.

Gordon Quinn, an independent producer associated with Kartemquin Films in Chicago, called the funding to be generated by the spectrum fee "a red herring." He viewed the real issue as one of public ownership of the airwaves and accountability of the licensee to public service programming. With that principle abrogated, Quinn felt it would be "a matter of time and corporate lobbying before the funding would be 'whittled away'."

The Chicago hearing was criticized for lack of advanced publicity, lack of public education on the legislation, and allowing only one day of testimony. Ap-

proximately 60 people testified, although over three times that many requested to speak.

The sharpest attacks centered on the bill's projected impact on affirmative action hiring and the communications job market. Nancy Kreiter, research director of Women Employed (WE), a Chicago-area organization of working women, declared, "WE is appalled that the Van Deerlin-Frey bill virtually would eliminate the key component for insuring equal employment opportunity in the broadcasting industry."

The FCC has established affirmative action targets in the past. Although many groups feel these guidelines are painfully inadequate, the 1978 act would forbid the new regulatory commission from requiring Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) schedules.

According to Kreiter, "By striking the current requirements for licensees to submit EEO programs, the Act removes enforcement power from the commission and abolishes both the incentive and necessary obligation for broadcasters to

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## THE ECONOMY

# Prices, not wages, key to inflation

Inflation in the things that matter most to families was dramatically worse in the second quarter of 1978 than government statistics indicate.

A "basic necessities" index prepared by the National Center for Economic Alternatives shows that prices of food, shelter, medical care, and energy rose at a rate of 15 percent—more than one-third faster than the government's overall Consumer Price Index (CPI)—for the period March to June 1978.

Food, shelter, medical care and energy constitute nearly 70 percent of the expenditures for 80 percent of U.S. households.

"Basic necessity inflation is undermining family budgets at an incredible rate," warned Gar Alperovitz, co-director of the National Center for Economic Alternatives. "Household energy and food purchases are expenditures that can least be postponed, with mortgage and rent payments and doctor bills close behind."

The rate of basic necessity inflation for the first half of 1978 was 13.2 percent.

While inflation in medical care costs slowed from 8.7 percent to 7.5 percent on an annual basis, this was more than offset by increases elsewhere. Energy inflation more than doubled, from a 5.4 percent to a 12.3 percent. Food prices accelerated to 20.9 percent in the second quarter from 15.7 percent in the first, and housing costs rose from an annual rate of 11.4 percent in the first quarter to 12.8 percent in the second.

The report was skeptical about claims that wage demands were the primary cause of inflation. In the first quarter, for example, Federal Reserve policy and a sharp rise in mortgage interest costs contributed most to the overall inflation rate; in the second quarter, increases in food prices were the primary cause. As a result, the average worker still is not keeping up with the cost of living. Weekly earnings—after adjusting for inflation and increased taxes—fell by almost 3 percent in the first six months of the year.

While nominal wages rose 7.9 percent

during the first six months of the year, these increases were the result of efforts to catch up with previous non-wage related price increases, especially the high food and energy price increases that hit family budgets from 1972 to 1975.

"Inflation will not be altered by cutting the budget, scapegoating workers, or blaming environmental regulations," Alperovitz said. "Rising wages cannot account for the rising prices of houses built five years ago, nor of natural gas, nor of interest rates. And food price rises are primarily the result of poor weather and the beef cycle, not workers' wages."

Alperovitz pointed out that prices of other goods and services rose at a relatively low 5.2 percent annual rate during the first six months of 1978.

Alperovitz said that while food prices or energy costs "might" abate in the future, "the national wishing game on inflation must end at some point." He urged sharply focused direct attacks on the underlying issues, sector by sector.





Plan Decker

Four residents of Carver Park stand outside the Central Ave. unit of the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.

By Robert H. Holden

CLEVELAND

## CITIES

# Cops play chicken with Cleveland's mayor and blacks

## Police refuse to patrol Cleveland projects on foot because they are "too dangerous."

**I**N THOSE RESERVATIONS FOR THE black poor known as "inner cities," the police have never felt at ease. Overwhelmingly white, invariably living in all-white suburbs and trained in the ruling values, the police feel even more uncomfortable when entering such alien territory as public housing projects. People's lives are at stake every time two white cops climb out of their air-conditioned, carbine-equipped cruiser to serve a warrant or investigate a crime.

And the police know it. For one week in July, the Cleveland Police Department defied the mayor's order to start patrolling public housing projects on foot. Their refusal forced the mayor to fire 13 patrolmen, an act that touched off a 19-hour police strike. Despite the vow of the president of the patrolmen's union that his members would never walk a beat in a project, the police backed down after two court orders were issued. Cleveland police backed down after two court orders were issued. Cleveland police were walking beats in the housing projects for the first time in the city's history.

William J. McNea, the president of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association, made it clear from the start why his members would not walk in the projects, called "estates" by the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority. Not only is the crime rate too high, McNea explained, but the "incidence against policemen" made it far too dangerous for them to walk, even in pairs. *The Call & Post*, the city's black weekly newspaper, quoted a former black patrolman who pointed out that "some white officers are scared as hell to go onto the estates because of fear of reprisals for acts of violence against blacks.... Enough people know that black heads are getting beat in station houses for no valid reason, and the guys that have to walk the beats know that they are the ones that are going to pay the piper."

Public housing tenants, accustomed to police neglect and brutality, were enraged by the patrolmen's attitude, but there was a touch of amusement in their voices. They seemed to savor the spectacle of 1,800 armed patrolmen, trained at public expense and driving cruisers with the slogan "Our Men Serve All Men," refusing to work in certain residential areas because they were *too dangerous*. "To think that trained, armed men are cautious about walking where I walk day and night gives one food for thought," said Diane Turnauckas, co-chairperson of the housing authority's Central Advisory Council.

Annie Howard, a 56-year-old tenant who hobbles around her high-rise project apartment with a cane, was more direct. "They're damned fools. The people need their protection. They're cowards."

Her voice rising in anger, Howard concluded: "They got a yellow streak down their backs, the chickenshit bastards!" She and other tenants offered to accompany the police on their rounds if it would make them feel more secure, but the patrolmen declined.

### Patrolmen fired, police strike.

The administration of Mayor Dennis J. Kucinich, the 31-year-old independent whose politics seem to be genuinely progressive and anti-establishment, ordered the police to walk beats in 14 of the city's 29 housing projects. It was the first time that police had ever been told to patrol the projects on foot, despite the fact that it is clearly impossible to police them adequately from a patrol car. Few if any streets bisect the projects, where many of the housing units are clustered.

On Friday, July 7, the day before the foot patrols were to begin, police protests forced Kucinich to back down from his original order of one patrolman per shift in each project. He allowed them to work in pairs at night; the lone patrolman on the day shift could ride a scooter. On Saturday, McNea swore his members would never patrol a housing project except from the safety of a cruiser. The projects, he said, were "jungles." That day and the next, 28 patrolmen refused assignments to walk in the projects, and were told they would be suspended. But the mayor relented and promised them a second chance. On Tuesday, 13 refused to walk the projects and were suspended. The next day, the 13 were again asked to work; they refused and were fired. That touched off a unanimous strike vote by the patrolmen's association, the bargaining agent for the city's 1,800 patrolmen. A few hours before the strike, which began at 11 p.m. Thursday, Kucinich had

compromised again, agreeing to let them patrol in pairs during the day as well as at night.

Early Friday morning, with the strike only a few hours old, the mayor toured three of the city's six police district headquarters, where he was greeted by crowds of drunken, cursing policemen, swilling beer drawn from ice chests on the picket lines. Firecrackers were tossed at him and a full can of beer narrowly missed the car. He tried to read a judge's back-to-work order but was drowned out by the strikers, who dashed to their cars to sound horns and sirens. Racist insults were hurled at Kucinich's black safety director, James W. Barrett, a former patrolman and detective who as a youth lived in the projects for 11 years.

The city's leaders braced for a wave of looting and violence that never came. Friday morning's *Plain Dealer* carried a story from Atlanta quoting Newark mayor Kenneth Gibson's speech to the National Association of Counties convention. The best way for cities to save money, Gibson declared, would be to fire cops; the crime rate wouldn't change a bit.

Kucinich asked Gov. James A. Rhodes to send in the National Guard. Rhodes, who sent the Guard to Kent State in 1970, refused. A second judge's order, staying the firings and sending them to arbitration, ended the strike at 6 p.m. Friday.

### Is anyone dead yet?

By then, the news media and the politicians had practically lost sight of the main issue—the lack of police protection for the 28,000 people who live in the projects. The residents can choose one of two sources of help in an emergency—a police department that rarely responds promptly unless someone is dead or injured, and a housing authority security force whose maximum number on any

given night is ten patrolmen. At a series of hearings and public meetings this year, residents begged the authorities to protect them from a wave of burglaries, robberies, rapes and vandalism.

"On Friday or Saturday night, if you see a man beating up a woman or a peeping tom, you can call the CMHA and they'll tell you they have just one car for the East Side and one for the West Side," Turnauckas said. "There have been times when there was just one car for both the East and West sides." If the police department is called instead, the dispatcher invariably asks, "Is anybody dead yet? Is anybody hurt?" If the answers are no, the police are unlikely to show up.

Even when they respond, patrolmen sometimes sit in their cars and just watch the action, then drive off. Adeline Turner broke two fingers separating her son from two older youths who were beating him as policemen watched idly from two parked cars. Another time, she watched two policemen in a parking lot beat up a youth suspected of carrying marijuana; he had to be carried to a hospital. "They think," said Turner, "that the only good nigger is a dead nigger, that the projects are jungles."

City officials and the news media pretended that race had nothing to do with the dispute, despite the fact that 74 percent of the projects' 11,123 families are black, while only 12 percent of the police force is black. Ten years have passed since the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) called for full integration of the police forces, noting that to many blacks, "police have come to symbolize white power, white racism and white repression. And the fact is that many police do reflect and express these white attitudes." Barrett has undertaken an intense minority hiring program to bring the proportion of black police into line with that of blacks in the city's population, estimated at 42 percent.

Police attitudes, Turnauckas said, seem to have improved somewhat since the early 1970s. "The police came very late if they came at all and automatically from their mouths came the words prostitute and bastard. That's what we were to the police." After residents met with some police supervisors, some change occurred. "But it's an uphill battle. Because every time the police chief or captain of a district changes, you have to go back in and remind them that we're human beings." Police attitudes, she noted, are not the only ones in need of revision. After she arranged for a woman newspaper reporter to stay overnight in one of the projects, the reporter's boss cancelled the plan—it was too dangerous, he said.

Many residents see the need to convert the projects from reservations of neglect to communities providing decent services for their inhabitants, including jobs and recreation facilities for unemployed youths, whom they blame for most of the crime.

"I'm against project-type living—it singles us out as poor people, just piling us one on top of another," said Marie Childress, who has lived in public housing since 1965. "In some estates we still have no place for the kids to dance, no basketball court, or even a grassy field for them to play on." She lives in the Riverview project on the near West Side, where even the swings are missing from their rusted frames, and the basketball court is too rutted to play on.

In view of the deepseated contradictions in the nation's public housing policies, police foot patrols seem like an insignificant step. Even so, some residents wonder how long they will last. "They're doing it today," Turnauckas remarked, "but what about tomorrow? What about next week? I'd like to be optimistic but I don't know how long this will go on." Sometimes, she admits, "I think somebody decided to have a war on poverty, and kill us off as fast as possible by moving us into the projects." Her doubts were echoed by Marsha Wiggs, a former project tenant who is now an organizer for the Cleveland Tenant Organization. "The Housing Authority promised them many things. But nobody believes them because they break their promises all the time."

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