

**"Now the NFCB is asked to help make policy, instead of hearing about it after the fact."**

## Lobbying dispells myths on Capitol Hill

Community radio's new visibility has a lot to do with lobbying by the Washington-based NFCB.

"The NFCB's filings have been among the best and most comprehensive received," says Frank Lloyd, administrative aide to the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Charles Ferris. "Their credibility here is quite high."

Last year, the NFCB's proposals for a major review of non-commercial radio by the FCC were adopted almost without modification by the Commission. The new rules reduce the status of the 10-watt "hobby" stations that have sometimes blocked community radio's development, create a minimum broadcast schedule requirement, and set aside new space for non-commercial stations on the FM band.

The NFCB has also been outspoken in its advocacy of a

proposed requirement for public participation in public broadcasting stations.

In its testimony before the House Subcommittee on Communications for a proposed rewrite of the Communications Act, the Federation pointed out that "in many cases public licensees are held by Boards of Regents or Trustees whose principal energies are devoted to other areas of institutional operations and who may not even reside in the service area of their own station. In these instances, a community advisory board (for example) can take on an important role in directing a station's work and assuring its responsiveness to those it serves."

Community radio lobbyists are now showing up at the relentless round of hearings, rule-making procedures and policy meetings where critical decisions are made. NFCB executive di-

rector Tom Thomas, associate director Terry Clifford and others recently participated in CPB's review of its funding priorities, Congressional hearings on public radio legislation, an HEW advisory panel, and the Carnegie Commission's recent review of public broadcasting.

Another important function of the NFCB is dispelling the myths about community radio.

"When Terry and I first arrived in Washington we continually encountered the stereotype of community broadcasting as interesting, innovative and creative radio that was poorly organized and financed in addition to being generally obnoxious and hostile to the D.C. establishment," Thomas recalls.

"No longer—now we're being asked to help develop policies instead of hearing about them after the fact."

—Richard Mahler

## Conference builds program links, airs stations' conflicts

BY ALAN SNITOW

**"T**HE NATIONAL FEDERATION of Community Broadcasters has outgrown the consensus of self-perception upon which it was founded."

Responding to this call for the NFCB's fifth national conference, more than fifty broadcast organizations gathered at a college campus near Olympia, Washington in August to plan the course of a movement that only a few years ago was just "a lot of dreams." Participants were for the most part young and white, men and women. Many identify themselves as supporters of the anti-war, civil rights and counter-culture movements of the '60s.

This year the mood at the conference had changed dramatically. Community activists were now experienced managers and staffs of radio stations. Although still small and underfunded, the stations are no longer merely "the poor ones" in the world of non-commercial radio. "Community radio stations," said NFCB President Tom Thomas, "have finally reached a point of

critical mass."

The '70s were years of hardship and slow growth for community radio, but the enormous optimism at the conference is reflected in awards garnered by community stations for their programs this year and in the increased recognition of NFCB's influence in the public broadcasting bureaucracy in Washington (see sidebar).

To better blend with the assembled participants, representatives from the Federal Communications Commission, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and National Public Radio shed their capitol cloakroom garb for jeans and radio station promotional T-shirts. Community radio people continue to distrust national bureaucracies. That distrust also extends to the possible expansion of NFCB operations into national and regional projects.

"Is it possible," asked Tom Thomas, "to take on new regional and national projects without losing some of the key elements in the identity of the local stations as they now operate?" At this conference NFCB initiated a national planning process for community radio aimed at answering that question and at providing guidelines for development in the coming decade.

One new proposal calls for expansion of the NFCB program service, which already distributes programs to more than 130 non-commercial stations. A part of that expansion might include the development of regional production centers to attract independent producers, as well as providing increased facilities for station-based programmers. Some station representatives pointed to NPR as an example of how the stated concept of "decentralization of program sources" can still lead to an inaccessible and isolated national bureaucracy. The same reservations were expressed about proposals for increased use of the new public radio satellite system and the development of a national newscast by the Pacifica Radio group. (see p. 23). However, optimism seemed to override most people's doubts.

The other issue before NFCB was the continuing poor record of both community and other non-commercial radio to adequately speak to the needs of third world communities. A caucus of third world NFCB members proposed two thrusts for the federation during the next year. The first was integration of the now largely white station staffs, and increased programming to serve third world communities. The caucus criticized minority program "modules" in an otherwise white format.

The second element in the program is increasing minority ownership of community based stations. NFCB's national office in Washington has long concentrated on assisting community groups through the federal maze

and onto the airwaves. "Our expansion," says Thomas, "is based on the opening of completely new stations."

The conference concluded with the election of a new NFCB steering committee, including women's and third world participation. This group in consultation with the stations will carry through the planning project.

As the more than two hundred conference participants started to leave the final meeting, NFCB chair Bruce Theriault of station KTOO in Juneau, Alaska, rose and spread his arms in benediction: "Spread the word."

## Soon: nightly national news from community radio

BY PAT AUFDERHEIDE

**A**LAN SNITOW IS NEWS director at KPFA, the founding Pacifica station in Berkeley, and a member of the steering committee of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters. After seven years at the station, he is now working on news programming for the Pacifica Foundation, which holds the licenses for the five major Pacifica stations (Houston, New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and the Bay Area). He talks here about Pacifica's plans for a national nightly news broadcast.

**Why is Pacifica starting a national news service?**

The aim is to put together community and noncommercial stations around the country into

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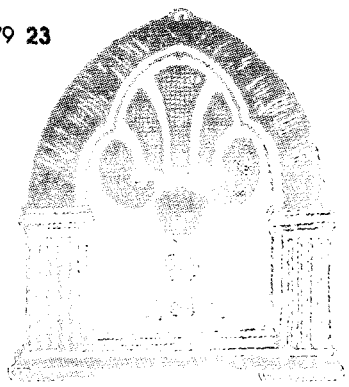
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## "Some radio people are afraid of making an impact. It can be consoling to be an outsider, a rebel."



Alan Smitow.

a network that will provide, for the first time, a progressive arena for news. It's a direct challenge to the networks, both commercial and noncommercial, in radio. How would it differ from NPR, as well as from CBS?

It will be a movement network; its purpose is to build a movement of community radio, as well as to challenge the network.

When you're doing news, you can provide an instant analysis and interpretation. Progressive media as a whole are shunted aside into weekly or monthly publications, or even quarterly. They can't reach people immediately. On a day-to-day basis at a national level, we can do that. We were able, for thousands of people in the Bay Area, to interpret Three Mile Island, while the major media were still peddling NRC press releases.

Most people are used to getting their news mostly from broadcast media, in some combination with entertainment and with a live sound. If we can do that, we can attract more listeners and more attention and begin to challenge the way things are being interpreted, on a daily basis.

Do the Pacifica stations share a perspective or a philosophy from

which to do that interpretation?

It's more a gestalt than a philosophy. They'd be likely to be antiwar, countercultural, and many people would identify themselves as left or movement people. But it's a united front, a broad perspective that would generally be considered progressive.

Differences arise mostly within the progressive perspective, and then there's usually an intense battle. In the early '70s there was a series of fights over the direction of the stations—whether there was going to be third world programming, women's programming, gay programming, what form it would take, how to relate to political movements. All of these things came with the departure of a crowd of people who had been doing radio throughout the antiwar years.

The task of the '70s has been defining the direction of the stations—how to avoid sectarianism. It has been resolved at various points. Our task is to be a forum or arena informed by a political perspective or a broad consensus on the issues and on the quality of the debate. Why is it better to have a national news service than the current locally-produced programs on Pacifica stations?

Because you can do both better this way. Look, every day I produce an international, national, regional, state and local news 45 minute broadcast. It's silly to do that on every station around the country. Our staff is 1 and 1/4 paid people. The only way to make any kind of an advance is to take that step of creating a division of labor.

You cannot gain the attention of people who are politically active in this society if you are not organized on a national basis. Most union members belong to international unions; they have to deal with national power, with national corporations. They are looking for ways of combining local with national clout.

Is the shape of the information, as well as the interpretation, different from network news?

Yes—typically community radio broadcast spends more time on news than commercial stations do. We give some time to a particular story, and try to give more information. Commercial stations don't do half hour newscasts. You don't find a lot of stories two and three minutes long. And you don't find a lot of hard news on NPR either, because they do a lot of features.

Are the sources of information different?

In Washington there is a fraternity of reporters and newsmakers, and that fraternity is an obstacle to people finding out what's going on. Of course, if we stay outside we won't get some things. The CIA will never use us to leak information.

We might find, though, that office workers find documents that they'll share with us. There are other ways of getting source information, more problematic ones and more interesting. There is a growing possibility that will happen as white collar workers organize. These people have stuff coming across their desks that concerns every conceivable form of corruption in business and government.

How many people will a Pacifica national news service reach?

Initially, half a million people. We're aiming for June 1980, with Pacifica stations.

What makes this possible is the satellite. For \$30 for 30 minutes, you can put up on a satellite a half-hour newscast that will be received simultaneously with high quality by 200 stations around the country.

Right now there is a crisis and a major opening—a very brief opening. There are elements of the new communications technologies that the corporations have not yet figured out how to package, where they can't control it because it seems so democratic. But they will find a way.

For a short period of time there's a possibility to get in and get on. We want to take that short period of time—two or three years—and establish a national news service.

Does that require special equipment?

Yes, and it's very expensive equipment. But the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) has decided that for public radio the thing of the future is to give 200 stations receiving dishes. So the equipment is being donated, mostly to NPR stations.

The government gives appropriations to the CPB, and under that is PBS, for television, and NPR, the radio production unit. CPB defines which stations are eligible for CPB monies, and all other CPB stations but Pacifica are members of NPR.

Who will you offer your service to?

To public radio stations, around 250 of them. There are major gaps—Chicago has a terrible public station, and Cleveland has none at all.

Many progressive stations are not CPB qualified. They may be important voices in the community and might be well-served by

a national newscast, but may not have the budget or the staff to qualify for one of the receiving dishes. So these stations will have to figure out how to get the material from the satellite—perhaps make arrangements with another station to take it or link up by phones.

These are engineering and money problems.

Are the major problems at this stage technical ones?

There are two frustrations with this project. One has to do with technical aspects and the other has to do with the stations. Most community stations—in fact, most of the progressive media as a whole—have a justified fear that they're not doing an effective job at the local level.

But there's also a sense that a more-than-local organization will be a threat. It's not a threat to their autonomy—that is never really the issue. But I think there is a fear of having any impact.

There's something very important and self-consoling about always being the rebel, on the outside, not being able to have any political power. So it's a constant job to convince people

that they are radio journalists, a force in their communities, and a major one if they have some sense of where they can impinge on a situation.

I think too people are coming out of a long phase of shell-shock, and feeling that if there's any kind of public disagreement on the left, that's destructive. For people who have not had any impact, who have no sense of their power to elicit a response, you have to start somewhere getting a response. We'd better start with ourselves, if we are going to have any sense that we can do that with other sectors of the population.

There's also a common belief that the only effective media are not ours, but the alien media that always seem to be crushing us. Often people do not relate to Pacifica, to ITT, and other progressive media in the country as the infrastructure for a challenge to precisely what everybody's complaining about: CBS, the Washington Post, the L.A. Times and so on. We have to insist and make sure that what we are doing is important, and that it has an impact.

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