

# Remote Control

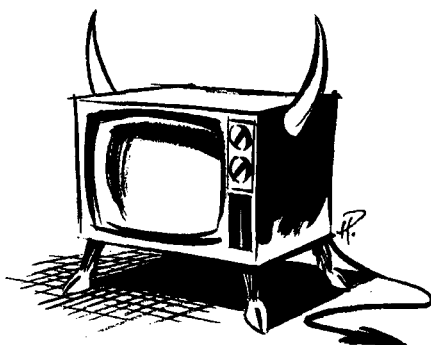
By Adam Clayton Powell III

**In South Africa, the revolution will be televised by government-owned stations.**

**W**HEN NELSON MANDELA WAS released from a South African prison three years ago, one of his preconditions for participating in national elections was the abolition of government control of television. Although South Africa is scheduled to hold its first nationwide vote open to all races this April, all TV newscasts in South Africa are still broadcast from government-owned television headquarters in Auckland Park. Even more important, all news on all of the television channels is scrutinized by one department, under one editor at the central studio. The more some things change in South Africa, the more others stay the same.

The centralized structure of South African television mirrors the centralized structure of state security and control. Just as the white minority government created a central security bureaucracy to enforce apartheid laws, so it also created a central broadcasting organization, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, to produce and transmit all authorized television. When television came to South Africa in the mid-1970s, years after it was a staple in most of the world, the government viewed it (not incorrectly) as a dangerous, revolutionary tool, a window through which even the poorest rural villager could glimpse the fruits of a free society and a free economy. Not surprisingly, all television news explicitly favored the government.

All programs were produced or acquired by the National Party, which has ruled South Africa since 1948. The "Nats," dominated by Afrikaners, viewed



the SABC's nearly 6,000 jobs as part of the political spoils system. While the National Party never won more than 55 percent of the vote in a time when only whites could vote, the Nats were able to exercise absolute control of SABC appointments under a winner-take-all arrangement. Even with the impending election and the probable electoral rebuke of the National Party, SABC remains very much a Nat stronghold. Of 61 managers, one is black, one is an English-speaking white, and the remaining 59 are Afrikaners.

SABC has responded to calls for more diverse programming in several ways, none of which can be mistaken for setting up a thriving marketplace of ideas. Last spring, David Frost hosted a series of special political programs. Viewers can now see CNN in bits and pieces, and Britain's Sky News channel is carried for part of the day. Recently, the network has purchased a few news programs that were not produced in its own newsroom, notably the talk show *Future Imperfect* and a short series of news programs produced by the muckraking *Weekly Mail*.

Meanwhile, the only commercial television license has been awarded to the country's major newspaper publishers, who promptly turned their network into an HBO-like movie channel. Although one might expect otherwise from a company owned by newspaper publishers, the network does not produce any newscasts.

Although it's clear that massive political change is coming to South Africa, the

future of its state-run television enterprise has yet to come into focus. As political reforms got underway, there was much excited talk of fairer political coverage on television, of shows produced by leftists, centrists, and rightists, of new networks to be owned by blacks, whites, Asians, and coloreds. But in spite of the talk, SABC retains its monopoly. Illegal radio stations broadcast news and music—and commercials—but pirate television stations have yet to appear. If anyone has anything to say to the millions of South African voters who watch TV news, there is only one place to say it.

**W**HILE IT'S HARDLY SURPRISING THAT the Nats have attempted to maintain control of the airwaves, the slow pace of television reform is potentially a major problem for the new South Africa. As George Gilder noted in *Life After Television*, television is a "totalitarian medium" because it locates power in a few broadcast centers that originate programs for mass audiences. Such a "master-slave architecture" tends to cause severe bottlenecks of the knowledge necessary for the proper functioning of a democracy. How can people make well-informed choices if there's little or no access to information?

As long as a top-down authoritarian structure is still in place, the opportunity for abuse is ever present. A future government could decide to continue shaping the news and to continue using the country's television monopoly to control political debate and discussion. Without a fundamental structural change, dialogue in South Africa may once again turn into a monologue.

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# Animal Farm, Circa 1994

By Steven Hayward

**Stakeholder representation means some interests are more special than others.**

CONSIDERING THE FLAP LAST SPRING over Lani Guinier's views on voting rights and balloting outcomes, you might not expect many new challenges to traditional methods of electoral representation. But a stealthy new form of special-interest politics is flying beneath the radar screen of hot-button issues such as affirmative-action quotas and "diversity." While "stakeholder representation" has avoided notice so far, it's likely to be a high-profile characteristic of the Clinton health plan.

Stakeholder representation refers to the growing practice of explicitly allocating positions on government boards, commissions, and advisory bodies to special-interest groups. A hybrid of quotas, Scandinavian-style corporatism, and old-fashioned interest-group liberalism, stakeholder representation holds that interests with a "stake" in a government policy or regulatory activity should be officially represented on the government agency that oversees that area of policy. While the theory posits a cut-and-dried reality, the practice is a sloppy, highly politicized affair. Self-appointed pressure groups such as environmentalists, consumer advocates, and civil-rights organizations share equal standing with parties who have traditionally represented constituent interests, such as business, organized labor, or property owners, while other interests are excluded altogether.

So far, stakeholding has been used mostly in an advisory capacity. In California, two recent high-profile stakeholder consensus groups dealt with growth and land-use issues, while another group, dubbed the "Sierra Summit," dealt with

the environmentalist agenda for the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Both efforts were convened at the behest of political leaders who like the "stakeholder consensus" idea because they think it can break "gridlock" and reduce the pressures brought to bear on them in the course of passing legislation.

While the California groups played only advisory roles, the idea of explicit stakeholder representation is slowly creeping into proposals for state and local government agencies and commissions. One recent unsuccessful bill in California would have required the governor to make appointments to a state growth-control agency exclusively from a list of names submitted by environmental, labor, and civil-rights groups. Another proposal for local growth-management councils in the state of Washington would have allocated memberships to government planners and environmentalists, while simultaneously prohibiting representation for the real-estate or development industries.

Stakeholder representation is also quickly gaining momentum at the national level. The Clinton administration loves the idea and has already established stakeholder-based selection criteria for its new Competitiveness Policy Council (not to be confused with former Vice President Quayle's Competitiveness Council, the Clinton council is an advisory body concerned about "long-term investment" in the economy). The 12 members of the council were selected equally from business, labor, government, and "public interest" groups.

The administration plans to deploy stakeholder representation on a variety of fronts, including the National Skills Standards Board in the pending education reform bill and the Regional Health Alliances proposed in the president's health-care package. Look for some kind of stakeholder scheme to be employed in the

bodies that emerge from the NAFTA side agreements as well.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THE IDEA OF stakeholder representation might seem like a simple extension of the idea of having expert qualifications for single-purpose government agencies—for instance, having economists and bankers work at the Federal Reserve—or like a variant of the idea of proportional representation. And the idea of balancing competing interests through "stakeholder inclusiveness" might seem to solve the old problem of government agencies being commandeered by self-dealing interests.

But, in practice, stakeholder representation entails favoring certain special interests over other interests, therefore biasing the outcome of any "consensus." As with the menagerie in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, some stakeholders are more equal than others. Not just *anyone* can be a board member of a Regional Health Alliance. The Clinton health-care plan favors certain kinds of people—employers and "consumer representatives"—while banning others: health-care providers, lawyers and other professionals working for health-care providers, and anyone connected with the pharmaceutical industry.

To anyone familiar with the workings of local, state, or national government, it is not really surprising that the balance of power among stakeholders is usually tilted decisively against business stakeholders (who are not, in many cases, noble representatives for free and open markets). But not only are business stakeholders outnumbered, the other supposedly disparate stakeholders—environmentalists, minority and civil-rights groups, organized labor, and local government—are usually united by a common interest in a bigger, more activist government. The dynamic implicit in "stakeholder consensus" steamrollers business interests into