

law, including the state's biggest education union, the California Teachers Association, presented it as a benign measure that would simply extend to charter school teachers the same rights enjoyed by conventional public school teachers.

Charter school advocates responded immediately, pointing out that the defining characteristic of charter schools is precisely that they are exempt from the usual requirements. Besides, they added, many charter school teachers already operate under a union contract. Even Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, who as governor of California supported unions, vowed to fight the bill to the bitter end. The message got through to lawmakers in Sacramento, and by June the legislation's teeth had been pulled. The CTA and charter school proponents made a compromise that put into words what was already in practice: Charter teachers can organize into unions if they want to, but they don't have to.

The fight was short but important, says Sue Bragato, executive director of the California Network of Education Charters. If it had passed, "it would have closed schools down," she says. California approved charter schools in 1992 and last year increased the number of charters allowable to 250 in 1999. Some of these will be brand new schools, but many will be traditional public schools that convert to charter status. Bragato believes that the CTA is running scared as charter schools become less of an experiment and more of an established alternative to public schools. After all, she points out, if more schools open or convert with no official union requirement, the

DATA

Taken to the Cleaners

By Michael W. Lynch

For the government, there's no tax like a hidden tax. That's why a considerable chunk of the total taxes we pay is hidden. In February, *The Washington Post* itemized the costs that go into the \$1.10 a person might pay to have a shirt professionally laundered. Setting aside the sales tax, the *Post* estimated Uncle Sam's take at 4 cents—a whopping two-thirds of what they estimated to be the owner's 6 cents in profit.

	Total Cost	Federal Taxes
Labor	\$.43	\$.13
Payroll taxes	.04	.04
Rent	.12	.04
Supplies	.09	.03
Depreciation	.09	.03
Utilities	.07	.02
Insurance	.04	.01
Office & administration	.04	.01
Repair & maintenance	.03	.01
Advertising	.03	.01
Interest & bank charges	.03	.01
Claims & miscellaneous	.03	.01
Profit	.06	.02
TOTAL	\$1.10	\$.37
Tax Rate		33.6%

Sources: *The Washington Post*, Gary and Aldona Robins

Some might conclude that this isn't so bad. After all, by this math, the government added a mere 3.6 percent to the pre-sales tax cost of the clean shirt. Not exactly, say economists Gary and Aldona Robins of the Texas-based Institute for Policy Innovation. They took the *Post's* analysis one step further, estimating the proportion of each cost factor that can be pegged to federal taxes. The *Post's* calculations, say the Robinses, underestimates the total tax bite—37 cents—by close to a factor of 10. Since even a third of the profit is really tax, Uncle Sam is the one cleaning up, with a take nine times greater than the owner's.

CTA stands to lose a lot of money.

That's one reason this latest anti-charter skirmish is unlikely to be the last. Indeed, even as they vanquished union-sponsored legislation, charter school advocates were fighting against an attempt to stop funding for charter schools that are not based in classrooms, such as home schools.

Hack Radio

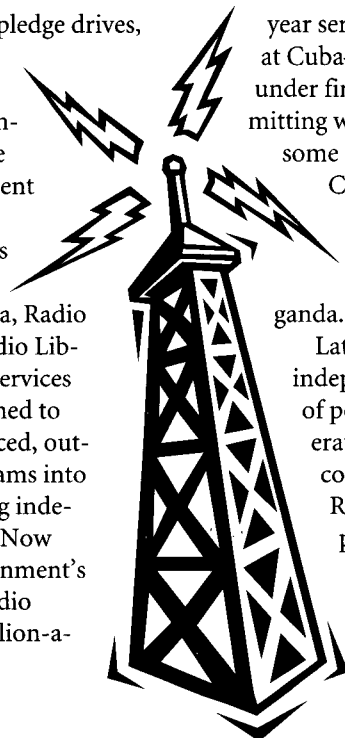
By Jesse Walker

The phrase *public radio* usually sparks thoughts

of NPR, with its pledge drives, symphonic hit parade, and middlebrow commentary. But the federal government devotes a much larger share of its budget to the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and other services putatively designed to broadcast balanced, outside news programs into countries lacking independent media. Now one of the government's operations—Radio Martí, a \$23 million-a-

year service beamed at Cuba—has come under fire for transmitting what even some critics of Fidel Castro have labeled "pathological propaganda."

Late last year, an independent panel of politically moderate journalists concluded that Radio Martí's programming suffered from "lack of balance, fair-



BRICKBATS

◆ Lexington, Massachusetts, is planning a big celebration for the 225th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington next year. But a planned re-enactment of the skirmish may have to be ditched unless a new state law is changed. The law requires trigger locks and gun lockers for firearms. The extra-long muskets the actors use can't fit into the typical rifle locker, and the trigger locks the state requires would clash with the realistic uniforms. An even bigger problem is getting carry permits for all gun-toting participants. These problems are so large that the group that performs the battle, the Lexington Minute Men, had to attend the governor's inauguration without their weapons.

◆ With the European Union contemplating cutting back subsidies, some ranchers and farmers may have to find other lines of work. But don't worry about the livestock, especially in Italy. Many of those animals are little more than figments of the imagination. The Italian Agriculture Ministry found that a full 41 percent of the sheep, goats, and cattle claimed by that nation's farmers don't exist. When they applied for subsidies, farmers would borrow each other's animals to make their flocks seem bigger. Inspectors only caught onto this when they started tagging animals with paint to make sure they didn't miscount.

—Charles Oliver

Scott Stantis



ness...objectivity...and adequate sourcing." They also accused the station of "confusing packaging" and "poor news judgment in story selection." This February, a lengthy federal investigation came to the same conclusion, finding that Martí's fare often fails to meet the International Broadcasting Bureau's news-gathering standards. Critics accuse the station of being virtually indistinguishable from Cuban exiles' talk shows airing on commercial radio—suggesting that the channel may be superfluous as well as journalistically dubious. Radio Martí's first news director, Jay Mallin, recently told the *Miami Herald* that the service is "out of control and very unprofessional."

Meanwhile, a new study by the State Department puts Martí's regular audience at only 9 percent of Cubans polled—a low estimate no doubt, given the difficulties of accurately polling the subjects of a dictatorship, but still only half the audience

found in a similar survey conducted five years ago.

While Martí has had detractors since it went on the air in 1985, things took a clear turn for the worse in 1997, after President Clinton appointed Miami lawyer Herminio San Roman to run the operation. Despite its shaky professional reputation and leaking market share, Martí

has its defenders, most prominently Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. "The Clinton administration supports your efforts," she told Martí's staff at a recent ceremony. "We will fight for your budget. We will defend your mission." Even, it seems, if no one actually wants to listen to the station's product.



☛ "Nations, races, and groups don't cause problems, individuals cause problems. The world isn't in a mess, people are in a mess."

—from "The Avenging World"

☛ "The essence of the crisis in the air...[is that] political control of airports, airways, and airlines prevents the normal market mechanism from operating. It is impossible to determine the true demand for air navigation service, since the users...[and] the airlines...do not pay for it."

—from "Fly the Frenzied Skies"