

Subscription TV? Yes: 74%

By IRVING KOLODIN

LIKE Goethe's "Sorcerer's Apprentice," who found a magic word for initiating an action but knew no way of stopping it, SR has had a veritable deluge of answers to its two endeavors to sound reader sentiment on the moot question of Subscription TV. Whether in response to the direct mail ballot to a cross-section of subscribers, or from those taking advantage of the coupon originally published in the issue of April 28 and reprinted in that of May 14, the sentiment seems to be: TV is grand, but Oh those programs!

In other words, the sentiment favorable to some kind of Subscription TV, meaning a system in which the viewer could pay for, and receive, a program of his own choice—and theatre, first-run films, and musical attractions run very high in the order of preference—breaks down as follows:

MAGAZINE COUPON MAIL BALLOT

YES	74%	64%
In this respect the two-way poll shows a startling similarity to figures gathered from other polls and expressions of opinion in various parts of the country. A Tele-Census in the Los Angeles area (conducted by an objective agency and recently reported in <i>Variety</i>) showed—among 2,600 TV set owners—67.2 per cent in favor, 19.3 per cent opposed. An uncounted 13.5 per cent were non-committal. In Chicago, the <i>Daily News</i> has been polling its public, with this result: in favor, 1,414, opposed, 602. And mail to the FCC itself has been showing a trend better than two-to-one in favor for a number of weeks.		

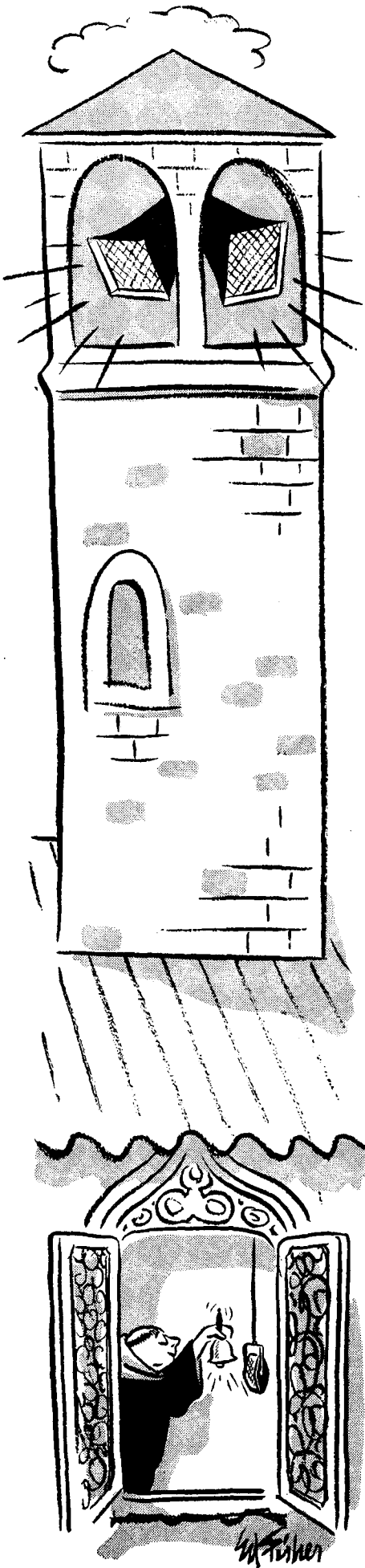
The box score of figures accumulated from SR's two polls is presented, in detail, on an adjoining page; hence, there is no pertinence in reviewing them again here. Two things are unmistakable: a considerable number of Americans who do not now own TV sets might be induced to tool up if such a device as Subscription TV were available to them. In numbers, the percentage was 13.6 per cent of those clipping the coupon (prior to May 11), and 18 per cent of those responding to the mail inquiry. Of secondary though hardly inconsequential interest is the sour view of some answering "No," who based their

answers on the conviction that the hucksters would take over Subscription TV in no time and we'd be having the same old offerings, WITH advertising, PLUS a fee.

This bespeaks a decided lack of confidence in the good faith of those propagandizing the new methods, also a certain lack of firm statement of policy by same. Certainly, many of those who answered affirmatively to the proposition on Subscription TV would consider themselves "had" if, along with the fee they paid, went an insistent "sell." In fact, if I may consider myself representative of others, the device would go out with the first "hard" plug. If Zenith, Skiatron, Paramount, et al, have some reassuring words to say on the subject, time is at hand for them to speak up.

However, the fears may be premature. Writing in the *Sunday Star* (Washington, D. C., May 1, 1955) Harry McArthur—conductor of its "On the Air" column—regarded this contention as a cry of "Wolf" stimulated by some sheep in network clothing. "Subscription TV will take over all of television, its foes cry. Sure it will. Over the dead bodies of ABC, CBS, NBC, and all of Madison Avenue, it will. Even without the inevitable legislation to prevent it," writes McArthur, "this is a vision through a clouded ball." This, of course, is merely one man's expression of opinion, but his mention of "inevitable legislation" gives a clue to a possible source of relief.

It was touched upon in a discussion of many aspects of the whole situation in a letter to the *Sunday Times* (New York, May 15) from Telford Taylor, formerly general counsel to the Federal Communications Commission itself. "It has been too soon forgotten," writes Mr. Taylor, "that radio-broadcasting was a rapidly growing though chaotic industry for a number of years before advertising was coupled with it. Had the technical means existed in the late Twenties to exact a fee from the listener in order to meet the costs of programming, surely this would have been done. The other mass media—newspapers, magazines, books, motion pictures—depend in varying degrees upon the consumer's as well as the advertiser's dollar. It was only for the lack of any practical way to collect the radio listener's dollar on a



per-program basis that advertising emerged as the sole economic base of broadcasting, and that Federal regulation developed within that framework.

"Opponents of Subscription TV," continues Mr. Taylor, "are under the heavy burden of justifying a government prohibition against doing in broadcasting what has always been done in the other mass media; of justifying what amounts to a monopolistic privilege—that the radio frequencies shall be available for commercial exploitation exclusively for advertising purposes. This is a strange outcome, especially in the light of the Congressional declaration of policy that the channels shall be available 'to all the people of the United States.' It is also a result completely out of keeping with American traditions. 'Let the people choose' has been a tenet as fundamental in marketing economics as in electoral politics. . . ."

THAT, of course, is the heart of the matter, and Mr. Taylor's belief that we are involved with a fundamental issue involving the American tradition of free choice is overwhelmingly supported by those responding to Question 13 of SR's poll: "Do you feel that 'Subscription TV' should be authorized by the Federal Government so that the TV audience can at least choose between networks shows and paid TV?" The coupon clippers responded 81 per cent in favor, with 16 per cent opposed; the mail ballot was divided among 72 per cent yes, 12 per cent no, 2 per cent indefinite, and 14 per cent non-responsive.

In other words, if there is a method available that promises to improve a service currently deemed unsatisfactory by two out of three Americans who have utilized one or another methods of expressing an opinion, can it be reasonably suppressed by scare stories about what MIGHT happen before it has been given a trial?

The apprehensions about mis-use remind one that every addition to man's resource has had to battle his ingenuity for devising ways of mis-using it. Nobody rejects the airplane because it is an instrument of mass destruction; it can also carry serums to combat a plague. In terms of such power for good or evil Subscription TV is fairly trivial; but its proper utilization promises a material addition to the amenities of life. The public interest, as manifested by all objective expression, is decidedly involved: thus forewarned, the agencies of government opinion are enjoined not merely to act, but to act wisely, courageously, and above all, realistically.

BALLOT REPORT: Following is the itemized report of SR's Subscription TV ballot. The numerals in the third column refer to percentages in the replies of those to whom the ballot was mailed directly; the fourth column to those who cut the ballot out of the magazine.

QUESTION 1: Do you live in a community that receives television broadcasts regularly?	Yes No No Answer	98 1 1	99 1 1
QUESTION 2: Do you now own a television set?	Yes No No Answer	59 39 2	83 16 1
QUESTION 3: Does the idea of subscription TV appeal to you?	Yes No No Answer	64 25 11	74 25 1
QUESTION 4: If "Subscription TV" were available, would you install a connection in your home?	Yes No Indefinite No Answer	57 24 9 10	73 21 1 5
QUESTION 5: What do you think is a fair price to charge for a single show seen via "Subscription TV?" Recognizing that different shows may vary in cost, please check two of the following prices to indicate what you think would be an acceptable price range for your family budget.	25¢ 50¢ 75¢ \$1 \$1.25 \$1.50 \$1.75 \$2 \$2.50 Nothing Indefinite No Answer	28 40 16 32 6 10 1 6 3 1 3 20	51 34 37 10 14 1 6 3 1 15 9
QUESTION 6: How much do you think you would be willing to budget a week to watch "Subscription TV?"	50¢ \$1 \$2 \$3 \$5 \$10 Nothing Indefinite No Answer Other Amounts	10 20 22 12 5 1 8 4 18 9	8 14 25 25 3 3 1 1 15 9
QUESTION 7: How many hours a week do you watch TV now?	1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 11-14 15-18 19-22 23-more None Indefinite No Answer	12 11 10 5 9 5 4 4 4 21 3 12	9 11 11 9 14 8 8 8 9 8 1 4
QUESTION 8: In what area of entertainment do you think "Subscription Television" could contribute most to expand present TV coverage?	Theatre Music First-Run Films Sports Education Special News Features Lectures Public Affairs Science Arts, Culture Others	65 38 38 13 9 3 2 2 2 4 8	76 56 57 25 11 2 2 2 2 10
QUESTION 9: Are you satisfied with the children's programs now shown on TV?	Yes No Indefinite No Answer	7 48 6 39	12 52 1 35
QUESTION 10: What other kinds of children programs would you welcome?	Educational Drama Music Science Walt Disney Cartoons Arts, Culture Nature Travel, Geography Fairy Tales Movie Classics Books	13 8 6 6 3 6 4 3 2 1 4	16 6 9 5 5 4 3 3 3 4 1
QUESTION 11: Would you pay to have your children see the above programs?	Yes No Indefinite No Answer	35 12 1 52	43 13 1 43
QUESTION 12: If YES, how much would you pay daily for such programs?	25¢ 50¢ 75¢ \$1 \$1.50 \$2 or more Indefinite No Answer	42 28 6 13 1 3 3 4	45 31 6 10 1 3 3 4
QUESTION 13: Do you feel "Subscription TV" should be authorized by the Federal Government so that the TV audience can at least choose between network shows and paid TV?	Yes No Indefinite No Answer	72 12 2 14	81 16 1 3

QUESTION 14: What do you consider your favorite TV program now on the air?
ANSWER: "Omnibus" (26, 33), George Gobel (13, 14), "See It Now" (12, 15), "Toast of the Town" (11, 10), Sports, Fights, etc. (11, 14), Dramas (8, 13), "Disneyland" (7, 6), "Studio One" (7, 9), Ed Murrow (no show specified) (7, 14), News commentators (7, 8), "Person to Person" (7, 7), Robert Montgomery (6, 5), "What's My Line?" (6, 3), "You Bet Your Life" (5, 6), "U.S. Steel Hour" (5, 8), "Meet the Press" (5, 8), Philco, Goodyear (5, 5), "Kraft Theatre" (4, 4), "Adventure" (4, 8), "Voice of Firestone" (4, 4), Jackie Gleason (4, 6), "Dragnet" (4,—), Music, Operatic (4, 6), "You Are There" (3, 4), "Medic" (3, 3), "Halls of Ivy" (3, 3), Sid Caesar (3, 3), "Now and Then" (2, 4), "I Love Lucy" (2, 3), "Mr. Peepers" (2, 2), "Mama" (2, 2), Chicago Symphony (—, 2), All Other Programs (36, 37), Indefinite (3, 3), No Answers (28, 14).

TV in the Mail

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letters have been selected from many more on hand, and the proportion of favorable to unfavorable directly corresponds to the affirmative-negative ratio in the complete mail thus far received.

SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION piece . . . well-assembled, logical, intelligent. No more cogent summing up of public's right to try out new and unfolding phases of any serious enterprise has to my knowledge been written than the last twenty-five lines of article. One other thing. There is no such thing as quote free unquote television.

MEREDITH PARKER.

Mexico City, Mex.

IN A COLUMN BY Caswell Adams [*New York Journal-American*, Apr. 30] he told of having interviewed a representative of the Zenith Company, leading makers of the "pay-to-see" TV gadget. Mr. Adams stated that, although the gadget would cost fifty dollars, the Zenith representative had assured him, clearly and unequivocally, that there would be no charge to the public for it. (Imagine that!) The Zenith man further declared that, come approval of the FCC, 36,000,000 television sets would be tuned into a heavyweight championship fight in 1957.

Now, at fifty dollars a gadget, 36,000,000 gadgets certainly comes to \$1,800,000,000. Here Mr. Kolodin's key query "Whose Money Talks?" becomes sharply pertinent. Not being a philanthropic firm, Zenith clearly intends to get that money back. One guess only is permitted as to where this \$1,800,000,000 will come from.

To carry this economic nightmare just one step further, an entirely reasonable assumption is that—if Zenith gives the public the gadget free—an installation fee will follow as the night follows the day. This installation fee, let us say, will be moderate—thirty dollars. Well, 36,000,000 times thirty dollars comes to exactly \$1,080,000,000.

Here we are approaching the staggering figure of \$3,000,000,000 and that, it must be remembered, gets the public not one "pay-to-see" program. What it does get the public is the exciting privilege of paying from fifty cents to two dollars or more to watch just one television program. Thus, in the first year of "pay-to-see" TV there is the clear and present danger that the cost to the public could be in the neighborhood of \$5,000,000,000! Now, if you please, whose money is that talking?

ALFRED STARR.
Co-chairman,
Organizations for Free TV.

New York, N.Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: As mentioned in a previous issue [SR May 14], Mr. Starr's "Organizations" include the Theatre Owners of America, the Broadway Association, Retail Merchants Association, etc.

I THINK Subscription TV should be authorized by the Federal Government by all means. The opponents of the above have one very good argument. I agree

with them in saying that if we do have paid performances, presently we shall be paying for anything really worth while.

GLADYS M. VINCENT.

Cambridge, Mass.

I AM AGAINST Subscription TV because it would discriminate against those people that can barely afford to keep a television set operating. Why take all the pleasure the poor people have to cater to people with expensive tastes?

MRS. ANTON LINN.

Portland, Ore.

I AM VERY HAPPY to see that SR has recognized the very important public issue at stake in Subscription TV. The issue has been very much complicated by the opposition who are assuming that pay television would displace free television from the air. There are no grounds for this assumption. The engineers of the FCC say that the development of the UHF band would make possible a minimum of ten stations in every area throughout the country. This would mean that several pay stations as well as educational television stations could be licensed for this purpose exclusively. Unquestionably our most powerful and useful medium of communications would better serve our free democratic society if it were directly responsive to the diversified needs of our people through direct audience payment rather than by product advertising. . . .

SIDNEY DEAN.

New York, N.Y.

I STRONGLY FEEL that many people would be willing to pay for top-grade entertainment on TV if it were available on a subscription basis (and without commercials).

H. J. HEINE.

Western Springs, Ill.

POSSIBLY THE FCC shouldn't even be considering Subscription TV. If it authorizes it I hope it retains enough semblance of concern for the public interest to make it UHF-only. This would mean buying both adapter and attachment (and that will raise a yowl), but it might help open UHF, and begin to undo the bungling that now leaves most of the country virtually TV-choiceless. Might not this situation be the most basic reason for lack of service to TV minorities?

J. M. B. CHURCHILL, JR.
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

I DO NOT WATCH television although we have a set. Why? Because the program directors evidently believe that my mental age is twelve (or lower) . . . If I could believe that Subscription TV would bring into my home fine music, ballet, good plays, in short, real stuff, I would pay for it, yes! But frankly, gentlemen, I doubt it.

MRS. H. F. BARAL.

Milwaukee, Wis.

I AM ENCLOSING my TV ballot and wish to inform you that I am intensely interested in this project. I am a forty-one-year-old *Hausfrau* attempting to acquire

"culture" in the form of continuing my studies. . . . This strikes me as a prime opportunity for us "little people" who are not great culturists because we've never had the chance.

Mrs. J. H. J.

Davenport, Iowa.

MY FEELING is there would be no need for Subscription TV if there were available adequate educational television compared to our Wisconsin state-owned educational radio network. . . .

HELEN ARNOLD.

Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

I ADMIT MY REASONS for objecting are personal and financial. Nevertheless, TV broadcasting has not worked out too badly up to now. . . . The idea of Subscription TV does not appeal to me because, while it is not actually discrimination, it sounds something like it. Broadcasting should be open to all who want to receive it.

SUSAN A. LONG.

Lancaster, Penna.

CONGRATULATIONS for the proposed Subscription TV. It is long overdue. I would give my heart's blood and a good percentage of our hard earned cash (ages seventy) not to have to endure commercials. In preference, we turn off TV and do without favorite programs. More power to you.

MRS. JACOB F. PRATT.

Schaghticoke, N.Y.

WE ARE GETTING damned sick of the commercials. We now have double sponsors. What does that mean? It means, on a half-hour program, that we hear five commercials . . . for this reason we absolutely refuse to turn on any channel where Eddie Cantor is scheduled to appear. . . . One more thing: if we have to stick a quarter in the slot (or its equivalent) for every program, we are going to be **SELECTIVE**. . . . We will save our quarters for special events that have an intrinsic interest aside from that of entertainment . . .

NOEL M. LOOMIS.

Minneapolis, Minn.

I THINK IT is time that the "public" takes a stand, a simple democratic one. The best should be available to everyone.

Therefore I oppose Subscription TV. . . . It is morally wrong, especially in a democracy, to put a heavy price tag on cultural or any other kind of top-level entertainment. Maybe I can afford it, but what about the next guy?

MRS. LOUISE J. STURGIS.

New York, N.Y.

IF ASSURED that Subscription TV would raise the level of TV programming, I would willingly become a television set owner. However, if Subscription TV will be largely devoted to "I Love Lucy" and professional sports as opposed to good music, ballet, opera, and theatre, my home will remain televisionless . . .

MRS. E. ZWERLING.

Dayton, Ohio.

FIND ENCLOSED questionnaire on Subscription TV. I am definitely in favor of it to provide entertainment which is not available free. I would be glad to pay to watch college football games, championship fights, and first-run movies. As I see it, Subscription TV would be an