



## House Divided

**T**HE HOUSE version of *The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967* (H. R. 6736) has come out of committee and is headed, through the Rules Committee, to floor debate, with dangerous amendments that can cut the heart out of the whole concept of a vigorous, imaginative noncommercial radio-television alternative to the advertiser-supported network systems.

"In all very numerous assemblies," James Madison wrote in *The Federalist Papers* (No. 55), "passion never fails to wrest the scepter from reason." The Senate version of the bill (S. 1160) was well-considered and constructive, designed to sketch in the broad outlines of a viable, independent system, provide it with funds for launching, and give it a chance to show what it could do before more permanent policy and fiscal decisions were made. The House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce (thirty-one members) mangled the Senate version in two weeks of badly managed hearings. The five-minute rule for questions prevented the development in depth of ideas: Congressmen wouldn't wait for their turn and left, and some Representatives still could not grasp the essential vision of public broadcasting as something more than classroom-instruction television and radio.

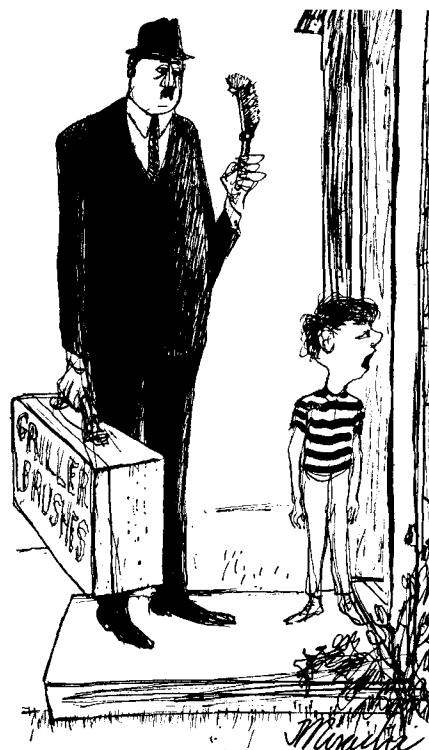
The whole House now has an opportunity to prove James Madison wrong. If it doesn't, the populous chamber will have rendered the nation a historic disservice, robbing it of a chance for a great leap forward in political and cultural enrichment which may never come again in quite the same form and at such a promising moment.

The most serious challenge was thwarted in the Committee's executive session; but Representative Albert Watson of South Carolina, who offered it and lost, has threatened to bring it up again on the House floor. Congressman Watson moved to strike out Title II of the Act, which would eliminate a Public Broadcasting Corporation that would make policy, insulate noncommercial broadcasters from federal political pressures, allocate funds to educational networks and stations, and generally encourage and lead the educational broadcasters into a new and grander role in the nation's communication experience. The vote was 18-13: it went generally along party lines, with Republicans in the negative.

Watson still fears the bogey of "thought control," doesn't trust the Act's

words of insulation, and thinks that an administration can get around it in actual practice. He would rather see federal funds fed directly to the stations. If the House buys this argument, it will be condemning the stations to the small, splendid isolation of petty sovereignties—a trifle richer perhaps, but without a powerful, central heating system to keep them mutually interconnected and working as a cohesive force to make a maximum impact on the American mind. The whole House can further demonstrate Madisonian reason by striking out an absurd amendment adopted by the Committee at the behest of Representative J. J. Pickle of Texas, whose contribution to the Act was a definition of "educational television and radio programs." These are, the Act informs us, "programs which are primarily designed for educational or cultural purposes and not primarily for amusement or entertainment purposes."

This, of course, has been the position of many commercial broadcasters, who see no difficulty, apparently, in wrestling with the angels that dwell upon the pins of the overlapping ambiguities of education, culture, amusement, and entertainment, and who do not attempt to walk on the waters of the word "primarily."



"Mom, there's a live commercial at the door!"

Was Falstaff designed for the groundlings or for the philosophers? The Philharmonic, presumably, by this definition, could not be "entertainment."

Other amendments added to the Senate version of the bill by the House Committee proscribe editorializing by noncommercial stations and endorsement of political candidates, and call for "strict adherence to objectivity in all programs of a controversial nature." Such a passion for neutrality misreads the spirit of the American experiment in representative democracy. Our elected officials cannot "filter" the opinions on public questions of vast numbers of their constituents. By the adversary system in open debate, they must confront the citizens with zealous views so that wise choices may emerge from the clash of vigorous minds. Objectivity is a shibboleth. The only nonpartisans wear tombstones for hats.

The proper measure of a station's performance in the area of controversy is "the fairness doctrine." Educators are presumed to be the transmitters of community wisdom. Shall they be prohibited from presenting and advocating positions fairly, while the commercial broadcasters (who make slight claim to be more than escape purveyors) are encouraged by the FCC to editorialize, provided they take pains to present all sides of an issue themselves or make offers of time to partisans?

The House Committee, jealous of its fiscal prerogatives, cut the life of the Act from five to three years and provided funds for a public corporation for one year only, with a new ball game at the end of that year. This misses the point that any federal funds would be only "seed money" to help attract support from private sectors of the nation. If the government doesn't care, why should the foundations or the big corporations—or the public?

The House Committee authorized another \$38,000,000 for Title I, the "facilities" section of the Act, for the construction and development of transmitters and studios. Congress has already invested a total of about \$70,000,000 in brick and mortar for noncommercial broadcasting. How incongruous that some House members still have doubts about spending some money for programs, without which the structures are, in Whitehead's felicitous phrase, merely temples to the spirit of "misplaced concreteness." The entire intellectual community of the nation, the presidents of three commercial networks, and the National Association of Broadcasters support the reasonable Senate version. Let the House prove false the sad comment of Madison: "Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob."

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



# Books

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## LITERARY HORIZONS

### A Broken Leg Can't Run

THIS has been a bad summer for all of us who have believed in and worked for and been a little hopeful about the cause of civil rights for American Negroes. The riots have not only been destructive in themselves; they have strengthened the segregationists by giving them the support of large numbers of white people who hitherto had at worst been neutral. Already there are signs of the "backlash" legislation and vigilantism that we can expect.

On the other hand, it is obvious to most of us that the riots are the direct, perhaps the inevitable, result of conditions for which the white majority is responsible. Some things have been done to improve the conditions of city Negroes, but once more it is a matter of too little, too late. We have heard Mayor Cavanagh asking in bewilderment and pain, "Why Detroit?" The frightening answer is that even a municipality that has done more than most others hasn't done nearly enough.

If the riots could make the majority of Americans realize what life is like in the Negro slums, they might be worth all they have cost; but I am afraid they are more likely to arouse fear than compassion. There have been books, powerful books, that have tried to show us what these slums do to the people who live in them: Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, and other personal stories of that sort. But most of us don't want to know.

Julius Horwitz, author of sociological studies such as *The City*, has tried his hand at a documentary novel—*The W.A.S.P.* (Atheneum, \$4.95). The title is not strictly accurate, for the central character is not the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant S. T. West but his Negro acquaintance, John Emerson. West is a prosperous New York lawyer of good family, a strong supporter of civil rights, and a devout Episcopalian. Emerson, who went through Exeter and Harvard on scholarships, entered Yale Divinity

School but left because he didn't find God in New Haven. Since then he has lived in Harlem, taking odd jobs and working with young Negroes in a storefront church. The man who tells the story is John Brooks, director of a philanthropic foundation.

Brooks reports on his own observations in Harlem, tells of talks with Emerson, includes many letters from Emerson to West and a few from Emerson to him, and sometimes introduces stories by other characters. In these ways he presents a mass of material: on filth and vermin in Harlem tenements, on the extent of and reasons for drug addiction, on both female and male prostitution, on early pregnancies, on violence as a way of life for the young, and on police brutality. It is all horrible and, I'm afraid, believable.

At one point Emerson writes Brooks about a talk he had with a young Negro who had led his gang in an assault on a girl of fourteen or so on the floor of Emerson's storefront church:

In his blue oxford button-down shirt and gray slacks the eighteen-year-old looked as though Washington Square was his natural habitat. But his natural habitat was emptiness. He told me that he had never seen his father, which wasn't unusual. He told me that when he was born his mother was on heroin and for the first few weeks he was a drug addict until the hospital detoxified him. He told me that when he was nine years old his mother was sent to the Women's House of Detention on Christopher Street for fifteen days. He said his mother was drunk and half crazy from caring for the five kids in the house. . . . He told me that when he was eleven his mother had syphilis. They lived on West 103rd Street then in a filthy welfare building and he heard screaming every night of his life there and most of the nights he had to sleep in the hallway while his mother took on customers when her welfare check ran out. He told me that one of his mother's customers tried to rape him, and his mother hit the customer on the head with a meat

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cleaver which she kept on the table for such emergencies.

The book is more documentary than novel. There are no living human beings in it; even Thomas Emerson, in whom it centers, is little more than a voice, though at times an eloquent one. Such scenes as there are seem contrived, and Horwitz doesn't know how to write plausible dialogue. There are two themes in the book that a real novelist might have made something of: one is West's feeling that he has never been able to become a friend of a Negro, even Emerson; the other is his notion that Emerson might commit "a murder that would reveal to America its crime against blackness." Horwitz fails to develop either theme.

While I was reading *The W.A.S.P.* the papers carried a letter that William Faulkner had written in 1960 to a former butler who asked him to contribute to the NAACP. "As I see it," he wrote, "your people must earn by being individually responsible to bear it, the freedom and equality they want and should have." I thought of a passage in