

manager Charles Allen, program director John Wilson, and members of the station's community advisory board. AMAC presented two general concerns: (1) the station's board included too many corporate representatives and was not sufficiently reflective of the broader community, and (2) there was not enough diversity in the station's weekly and nightly news and issues programming.

In mid-September, AMAC mailed copies of a special issue of *EXTRA!* to KAET-TV management and advisory board members. The issue featured a critical study of prime-time PBS programming by academics William Hoynes, David Croteau, and Kevin Carragee. The mailing included a letter urging KAET-TV to "be more inclusive of public interest voices" and specifically recommending the weekly human rights series *Rights and Wrongs*. AMAC also promoted a radio interview for Hoynes, to spread word of the study; at AMAC's urging, the station was able to recruit Arizona senator John McCain to join the interview. Blazier advises activists to seek out and use such empirical data in their public outreach and education.

The following month, AMAC members Blazier, Haverly, and Jean Chaudhuri met with the station's advisory board, station manager Beth Vershure, and John Wilson. The group repeated its concerns about the lack of diversity on KAET's board and in its programming. Chaudhuri suggested a Native American representative should be on the board. AMAC also recommended the station run *Rights and Wrongs*, *America's Defense Monitor*, and *We Do the Work*. Four AMAC members met again with Vershure and Wilson in February of 1994 for updates on the programs that had been discussed. The news was good. *Rights and Wrongs* was scheduled to debut on April 5, 1994. The station subsequently put on all fourteen episodes and then went into reruns. On August 9, Wilson said viewer response was favorable and the station might air the program the next year; *We Do the Work* was said to be still "under consideration." Blazier described the meeting to me as "upbeat." On Labor Day 1994, the station aired several hours of the series.

In 1994, Blazier moved from Arizona to Oregon to attend graduate school and the work of AMAC was carried on under the leadership of Dave Winkler, Mary Richards, and Gray Cavender. When I interviewed Winkler in September 1999, he had more successes to report. The AMAC core group continued to meet occasionally, sometimes showing a video to be considered for KAET-TV broadcast. Also, Winkler still made suggestions to program director Joe Campbell and wrote columns and letters to the editor to increase the pressure. Sometimes this effort was supplemented by supporters sending e-mails to the station and, on one occasion, by threat of a boycott. As a result,

in 1997 KAET-TV ran all twelve episodes of *We Do the Work* and now carries *Livelihood*. The station has also programmed several controversial documentaries, including *Father Roy: Inside the School of the Assassins* (1998), *Fear and Favor in the Newsroom* (1999), and the *Just Solution* series of four one-hour documentaries on human rights, produced and distributed by Human Rights Watch and Free Speech TV (1999). It must be acknowledged that the station refused to program *Tell the Truth and Run*, despite Winkler's offer to contribute \$500 of the \$1,000 license fee.

In Winkler's experience, "[KAET-TV] will ignore you as long as it can until you force the issue." It took a year to get the station to show *Fear and Favor in the Newsroom*. Nevertheless, persistence pays off. Looking back in 1997, Blazier advised those interested in similar work to network actively and to be persistent but not confrontational. "It doesn't take a lot of people to make a difference. In many cases I was working alone or maybe with one or two other persons."

Chicago

Up until 1992, reform activists had been frustrated in their appeals to Chicago public station WTTW-TV. In 1991, after the president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, Robert Healy, requested *We Do the Work*, WTTW's vice president for programming, Richard Bowman, told him the station "had concerns about the evenness of quality and the fairness of certain segments." At around the same time, Bob Cleland, the founder of Illinois Peace Action, asked the station for *America's Defense Monitor* (*ADM*) and was similarly dismissed.

In 1992, filmmaker Scott Sanders and activist Melissa Sterne began building the Chicago Media Watch (CMW), a local offshoot of FAIR, into the Coalition for Democracy in Public Television (CDPTV). As with its counterparts around the country, CDPTV came to include a great diversity of endorsers and members. Its stationary lists the Coalition for New Priorities, which itself includes one hundred groups, as well as more than twenty other organizations.

The CDPTV's steering committee included Sanders and Sterne, filmmaker Allan Siegel, and a number of concerned citizens. In the beginning, filmmaker Gordon Quinn provided meeting space and support. Sanders was elected to handle press relations and to represent the group to WTTW. One of his first projects was to publicize WTTW's refusal to air *Deadly Deception*, the Oscar-winning documentary critical of General Electric, which hap-

pened to be WTTW's top corporate contributor. CDPTV's stated mission was to "respond" to "WTTW's lack of public openness and narrow programming spectrum" through educating the viewing public and pressuring the station's management.

On June 9, 1993, coalition representatives attended the quarterly meeting of the WTTW board's programming committee. Scott Sanders spoke from a prepared text. He first commented on the "anti-democratic" restrictions that governed communications between the station and the public: inadequate public notice, limits on who could attend and speak, minutes and agendas denied, even letters on public file not available for inspection. "This is the last time we will meet under these ground rules," Sanders said. "They are anathema to the spirit of public broadcasting."

The lack of diversity on the "self-perpetuating" board, he continued, was reflected in parallel gaps in station programming: "No trade unionist on the board, no labor-oriented series. No community-level peace organizer on the board, no serious peace program." On the other hand, Sanders noted, corporations were well represented on the board and five of six public affairs discussion series were hosted by "avowed pro-corporation conservatives"; likewise, despite its noncommercial status, WTTW aired "commercials for the likes of realtors, utilities, car manufacturers and insurance companies." (The public broadcasting trade paper *Current* later noted that WTTW was "one of the most aggressive private-sector fundraisers in public TV." Indeed, in 1984 the station was one of the first to offer corporate donors on-air acknowledgements that resembled commercial advertising.)

Sanders then announced that CDPTV was seeking the airing of four programs on WTTW: the original version of the censored Republican Convention episode of *The 90's*, *We Do the Work*, *The Panama Deception*, and *Deadly Deception*. In his closing remarks, he suggested that the station's subscribers should elect the WTTW board. Soon after Sanders's presentation, WTTW added two members to its forty-five-member board, the first Latino and another African American.

Less than two months later, on July 28, thirteen CDPTV representatives met with WTTW's Richard Bowman and Bruce Marcus, vice president of corporate marketing and communications. The discussion covered better access for local independent producers, showing the two Oscar-winning films, and running *We Do the Work*, *America's Defense Monitor*, and *Rights and Wrongs*. At the meeting, the station agreed only to run public service announcements from the Coalition for New Priorities. In September 1993, however, WTTW launched a Sunday afternoon series called *Viewpoint* and

used it to alternately air episodes of *We Do the Work* and *America's Defense Monitor*. In February 1994, WTTW's *Eleven* magazine started to run letters to the editor "for the first time in over fifteen years." Finally, in April 1994, WTTW scheduled *Rights and Wrongs* for early morning broadcast on Saturdays.

In contrast to the tone of the accountability campaign in Phoenix, however, both station officials and activists in Chicago were reluctant to give each other much respect. Bruce Marcus said the coalition "played a role" in the decision to launch "a viewpoint program," but the decision to air the two alternative shows was "not in response to [the] meeting." He added that while *Deadly Deception* might run, *Panama Deception* contained "charges totally without confirmation" and would never be shown. Bob Cleland, who had fought for the latter, then referred to the program concessions made as "a couple of bones" to cover for the refusal of the two "deception" films. Nevertheless, on August 26, 1993, he wrote to 320 members of Illinois Peace Action, urging them to watch the two scheduled segments of *America's Defense Monitor* and send an appreciative response to station officials; Cleland later was named to the station's community advisory board.

The gains made by CDPTV seemed to be tenuous. By the end of April 1994, both Scott Sanders and Robert Healy were writing to Bowman to protest the moving of *We Do the Work* to 7:30 A.M. on Thursday mornings. Sanders complained to me that station officials said they only liked some of the *We Do the Work* programs and sometimes held segments for a month before showing them. Despite these obstacles, CDPTV organized a public event on May 2, 1994, that featured keynote speaker Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harper's*, and included panelist Bruce Marcus of WTTW along with filmmaker Gordon Quinn and representatives of Operation PUSH and the Mexican Fine Arts Museum.

The relationship between CDPTV and WTTW-TV ruptured on July 7, 1994, when the coalition filed a complaint with the FCC in response to what it called WTTW's "home shopping" broadcasts. For two weeks in October 1993, WTTW had displaced regularly scheduled programming on weekend afternoons and weeknights late to run about forty-five hours of "The Holiday Gift Exchange," in which the station peddled products and showcased the latest offerings from other cultural institutions in the community, like the Field Museum and the Lincoln Park Zoo. Most items were priced between \$5 and \$100, including such things as a Chicago Symphony Orchestra silk scarf and a Picasso poster from the Art Institute; most of the revenue went to the cultural institutions.

WTTW's Marcus insisted that the program was "educational and entertaining" and "didn't break any rules." Another spokesperson added later that "The Holiday Gift Exchange" had been "an experiment" and the station had no plans to repeat it. Gigi Sohn of the Media Access Project called it "an outrage" and called for FCC punishment: "They used the public airwaves, which were set aside for public education, to sell commercial goods. Don't they know that making money and the public interest are mutually exclusive?"

The CDPTV's seventeen-page complaint condemned the broadcasts as "setting a bad precedent." The Media Access Project and the Georgetown University Law Center provided legal counsel for the filing. Sanders stated in their press release, "Sometimes giving praise to WTTW is appropriate. But WTTW is just trying to sell us all a bill of goods with its home shopping broadcasts." Marcus countered by characterizing the challengers as "a few individuals trying to get an elected board here in Chicago and are grabbing onto every issue they can."

Throughout 1995, CDPTV promoted meetings with David Kohn, chief legislative aide to Congressman John Porter, to protest the Republican assault on public broadcast funding. For the CPB annual meeting in Chicago later that year, Melissa Sterne designed a leaflet which Sanders and others passed out, calling for PBS "democracy" and for "permanent trust funding for public broadcasting."

On October 23, 1995, almost sixteen months after the filing of the complaint, the FCC found no violation of the rules against commercialism on public broadcasting. The commission explained that it does not regard promotional announcements for nonprofits as advertising because technically the merchandise is not sold "for profit." On the other hand, it said, the station was wrong in changing its regular programming to raise funds for other nonprofits without a waiver from the FCC. And it admonished WTTW "to use care to comply with the Commission's noncommercial rules and policies in the future."

Commenting on the decision, *Current* editor Steve Behrens called it "a light slap on the wrist." Andy Schwartzman of the Media Access Project said he was pleased that the FCC had made a distinction between stations selling products for their own support and selling them for others: "We cannot save noncommercial broadcasting by commercializing it." He said his clients were ready to put this behind them and would like to "start off on a clean slate with WTTW."

When I talked to Sanders in February of 1996 he was rather melancholy about it all. "We haven't met as a group in several months," he said. "The problem is that we were not permitted to talk to the station while the suit was pending." Thinking about the future, Sanders said that he felt his group had "sufficient legitimacy to be represented on the [station's] board of directors," but he confessed to being "perplexed about how to reopen communication." "I would like to be perceived as having made a legitimate point and deserving of respect and not just [as] an adversary," he mused. "My real aspiration is for the station to offer programs which make it a public forum on important issues confronting the city."

Apparently the CDPTV complaint put WTTW on the FCC's radar. Late in 1997, the commission cited November 1996 underwriting spots for Zenith, Amoco, Prudential Securities, and Sun America Insurance as violating FCC rules and imposed a \$5,000 fine. The FCC said their action was prompted by a "confidential" complaint. WTTW conceded that the Zenith spot that promoted "images more realistic than ever before" should not have been aired, but it claimed that the FCC was changing the ground rules with respect to the other complaints. WTTW and PBS said they would seek a meeting to get a clearer understanding.

On January 2, 1998, WTTW filed a response to the FCC's "notice of apparent liability." WTTW executive vice president Bob Mauro took the position that this was "a system-wide issue, going beyond the walls of Chicago." *Electronic Media* called it "ground zero in the battle over [the] commercialization of public television." As of this writing, the fine remains unpaid. Sanders suggests that WTTW might be considering a court challenge, perhaps joined by PBS or by other individual stations.

In recent years Scott Sanders has become a librarian as well as a filmmaker, still interested in public broadcasting. In 1997, CMW and FAIR sponsored a full-day conference on "Media and Disinformation," featuring David Barsamian, Janine Jackson, and Ron Daniels. After a lapse, the *Viewpoint* series at WTTW was revived. In August 1999 it presented *It's Elementary*, a controversial Debra Chasnoff documentary on sexual preference.

The Chicago Media Watch has carried on under the leadership of Liane C. Casten and colleagues. The group puts out a quarterly newsletter, *Chicago Media Watch Group Report*, featuring media criticism and stories on issues like pollution in South Chicago that are not covered by the corporate press. The group also hosts a monthly series of speakers presenting news stories not covered by the mainstream media.