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SECRET TV STATION CONTRACTS

In the post-Watergate era of full disclosure, it is very difficult to understand why the Federal Communications Commission has allowed television and radio stations to continue to sign and fulfill secret agreements with coalitions of special-interest groups organized for the sole purpose of exercising hidden editorial and management control over the stations. But it has.

Furthermore, it takes diligent detective work and uncommon perseverance to get the stations to divulge the existence and text of the secret contracts. At the very least, they should be a matter of public information readily available in the public file.

Because of the rule against newspapers owning television stations in the same area, there has been a great deal of buying, selling and trading of television and radio stations. The liberal groups that want to exert hidden influence on the media watch the trade journals for announcements of such impending sales.

When a sale is under negotiation, the liberals ~~groups~~ form a "Broadcast Coalition" under some innocuous name, draw up a contract, and demand that the targeted station sign it. The mailed fist in the velvet glove is that the coalition threatens to file a "petition to deny" the granting of ~~of~~ a license to the new owner and thereby delay the sale for months or years. Since any delay is very costly, the station-victim signs up.

Now let's look at the far-reaching specifics of the editorial and management control which is delivered by the station under such a contract into the hands of a tiny ad hoc committee of leftwing liberals. The following examples are taken from a typical contract now in force against a leading television station in a major TV viewing area.

First, the ad hoc liberals set up their formal structure, variously called "Citizens Advisory Council," "Minority Advisory Council," or something similar. The station pledges to have its management meet at least four times a year with this council to discuss the station's programming and employment. The station must pay all the expenses.

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By the terms of the contract, the TV station agrees to produce and air a weekly half-hour prime-time program addressed to the needs and problems of minorities and women -- not just a talk show, but an entertaining program including films and other diversions. That's only the start; the station agrees also to produce other programs which probe the problems of minorities, women, and the civil rights movement.

The station pledges to buy for broadcast at least four half-hour programs per year which are independently produced by or on behalf of minorities and women, and for which the station will advance up to $20,000 for production costs. The station agrees to create a special community affairs programming unit to ensure the responsiveness of local public affairs programming to minorities and women.

The station, under the contract, will produce nine programs a year suggested by the council that involve its participation in conception, design and production. The station agrees to air two Free Speech messages per week, each repeated three times per week, and aired throughout the day including prime time.

The contract binds the station to create the post of "Minority Affairs Director" and to fill it with a person who "has demonstrated a sensitivity to equal rights for minorities and women." That's jargon which means "a black or a woman who does not support affirmative action is barred from the job."

The contract requires the station to hire at least seven new blacks in the top four job categories of officials and managers, professionals, technicians and sales, plus eight additional fulltime women in those categories. No one person can be counted as both black and female.

Twice a year, the station is compelled to submit to the "Citizens Advisory Council" full data by race and sex on hirings, firings, promotions, resignations, employee training, and employee recruitment. The station must provide $35,000 in scholarships and summer internships for minorities and women.

And what does the TV or radio station get in return for surrendering all this editorial and personnel control to a self-serving special-interest group masquerading as the "public interest"? "In exchange for the making of these undertakings, the Coalition has agreed to withdraw its petition to deny" the granting of the license to the new owner. It's quite a liberal racket, isn't it.

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