



Over the last six months there's been an explosion in cable-TV activity ranging from useful books to a national office devoted exclusively to providing non-partisan information about CATV. Here is a list:

#### CABLE TELEVISION INFORMATION CENTER

This is a three-year project funded by the Ford and Markle Foundations (at \$950,000 per year) to provide information to municipalities and community groups about the options available to them in granting and getting a cable franchise. According to Bowman Cutter, the Center's director, the information will range from simply answering questions to drafting feasibility studies and beyond to the point of assigning field workers to become actively involved in cable negotiations. Although the Center has just been in existence a short time it's already received over 200 requests for assistance from various city governments.

Cutter is a 29-year-old businessman with no previous experience in either cable or any facet of public (or private) television. Prior to his appointment he was an executive with the Chicago-based Northwestern Industries Conglomerate (and also taught in the business school at the University of Chicago). More important, he was campaign manager for Senator Adlai Stevenson and thus brings with him high-use knowledge about city- and state-level politics. Forty percent of his staff (of ten) will spend their time in the field and Cutter says that he is choosing them for their political savvy as well as their knowledge of cable.

While the Center is not conceived as a policy-making group, Cutter says it will offer both opinions and straight information. Moreover, he plans to stay in touch with successful cable projects to draw off their resources in advising other communities. This might lead to a library of successful videotapes so that nascent cable systems can see the potential of the medium through the medium itself rather than print and talk.

Cutter offers assurances that the Center will not function as an arm of the Ford-Public Broadcasting axis in an attempt to establish domination over cable-TV planning. In fact, he says, his liaison with them is informal and infrequent. From talking with him it becomes clear that his background in business and politics may be just what's needed in the position he fills. Where he may be weak is in understanding the programming potential of cable and thus it would be a good idea for people with practical experience to make contact with the Center and pass on print and video information. The address is:

Bowman Cutter, Director  
 CABLE TELEVISION INFORMATION CENTER  
 2100 M Street N.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20037  
 Phone: (202) 872-8888

#### BOOKS

*CABLE TELEVISION IN THE CITIES: Community Control, Public Access, and Minority Ownership.* Edited by Charles Tate. \$3.95 from the Urban Institute 2100 M Street N.W. West, Washington, D.C. 20037.

This book didn't cost \$500,000 to produce as did the Sloan Commission Report, but it's about 500,000 times more useful. In fact, it may be the best single resource book about cable-TV including as it does a bibliography of relevant publications, a list of research and demonstration projects, useful facts about the cable industry and the F.C.C.; and a rundown on the people in congress who sit on committees effecting cable.

More important, *CABLE TELEVISION IN THE CITIES* has a point of view—that minorities and community groups should control cable—and thus configures its information towards that end (there is even a list of community owned systems) right down to work-sheets which would enable you to make a practical estimate of your communities needs both in wiring and video production.

While the book is weak on programming ideas and the need for high flexibility video equipment, it is so comprehensive and fortunately non-theoretical that its use value can't be stressed enough. If your community is considering cable then get this book.

*ON THE CABLE: The Television of Abundance. Report of the Sloan Commission on Cable Communications.* McGraw-Hill (paperback). \$2.95. This book should be studied as a document in political science or sociology, because as an overview of cable it is of trivial important (see first article, this section).

What is important are the insights to be gained into the mentality of the foundation establishment which would pay \$500,000 to produce this document. Cable will change the nation, the Sloan Commission claims, but their claim is so devoid of exuberance or imagination that you wonder "why bother?"

It is of critical importance to understand that the drafting and appearance of this report was a major event deserving of full national coverage only because it reconfirms a traditional power pattern (foundation-report-publicity-maybe action), not because it had much to say. Thus, the foundation establishment used cable television to reassert its influence at a price of half a million collars while people actually working towards "the television of abundance" are for the most part without funds or organizational support.

Indeed, the most critical failure of the Sloan Report is that it offers no notions of how to integrate public access and other alternative types of programming into the economic life of cable systems. Yet, there will be no fundamental structural change in communications unless there are alternative ways of funding. Foundations are notorious for their lack of economic innovation, probably because they themselves never have to worry where their funding is coming from. Thus, the Sloan Report is preoccupied with guaranteeing cable operators unlimited access to imported broadcast signals (i.e. more of the