

Number 6

24 November 1988

IS AMERICAN TELEVISION THAT BAD?**Fact and Fantasy in the Free Broadcasting Market****RAYMOND B. GALLAGHER****SUMMARY**

With the publication of the Government's White Paper Broadcasting in the '90's a barrage of criticisms has been directed at its free market tenets. Foremost amongst these is that programme standards will fall and the viewer will be impoverished by 'wall-to-wall Dallas' and the type of inferior television which is allegedly the result of America's competitive broadcasting system. Yet the claims that American television supplies the average viewer with '35 varieties of totally similar rubbish' is not based on fact. The experience of American television is that more, and less regulated, channels generate more choice and more diversity in programmes and more programming typically regarded as the distinguishing feature of public service broadcasting: news and current affairs, religious and minority programmes and local programmes. This IEA Inquiry examines the evidence on American television and compares it to British television. It also dissects the critics' arguments that more competition in television means worse television. It finds them grossly overstated and many totally inaccurate. The conclusion is that the viewer is being misled by producer groups (broadcasters and other producer groups) who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

This IEA Inquiry is a shortened version of Ray Gallagher's chapter in Freedom in Broadcasting (ed. C. Veljanovski) to be published by the IEA early in 1989.



IS AMERICAN TELEVISION THAT BAD?

Fact and Fantasy in the Free Broadcasting Market

RAYMOND B. GALLAGHER

I INTRODUCTION

American television is getting adverse publicity in Europe. Implicitly and explicitly, both the content - seen as 'wall-to-wall Dallas' - and the structure of American television - representing a market-driven, rather than 'public service', broadcasting philosophy - are maligned.

At the extreme, one gets the impression of American television as the 'Great Satan' of world media, representing the worst, most base, lowest common denominator programming. Its relatively free market is seen as a free-for-all, a crass search for profit at the expense of diversity, quality and an informed, culturally enriched society. Americans, in spite of having a quantity of television no one can deny (indeed, to some, because of this), are thus considered 'impoverished' compared to their European counterparts.

In Britain, such views have reached an unheralded level of public visibility as policy decisions which will shape television's future draw closer, and as the stakes for vested interests grow higher. Indicative of this are the comments of a leading columnist in The Sunday Times (18 September 1988) that 'running a free market television company (in Britain) will be a grim, remorseless business, as it is in America,' and accusing government policymakers of 'dismantling a system that produces reasonably good television in favour of one which, on every scrap of available evidence, will produce incomparably worse television' (emphasis added).

In the very same newspaper, a full page advertisement (placed by one of the independent television franchise holders) could be found warning of the many threats posed by 'deregulated' television and competition. Its message is explicit: 'The best way to make sure it doesn't happen here is to preserve the environment in which British television operates'. This echoes the columnist's judgement that British television 'has not been bettered under any regulatory regime abroad', and that 'We should leave well alone'.

With the 'wisdom' of media commentators and industry 'insiders' given such visibility, and stated so explicitly, it is no wonder that degrees of this outlook have spread to become the general public image of American (and deregulated) television. Consequently, there is a widespread belief - at least implicitly - that television must be controlled in many ways in order serve the public interest; that is, to secure television's benefits, as well as to 'protect' from such 'dangers' as advertising and 'profit-seeking' companies.

Television Fantasy

Unfortunately, most popular opinion - and, less forgivably, much of that heard in the supposedly 'informed' policy debate - is flawed by a distorted picture of both American television and the functioning of the medium in a deregulated marketplace.

It is the contention of this IEA Inquiry that many of the negative depictions of American and deregulated television (such as those listed in Table 1) are sheer fallacy, or at best half-truths, while others rely on vague or extremely subjective notions to establish the 'inferiority' or 'evils' of the U.S. system. Simultaneously, the strengths and benefits of America's relatively free television structure are usually ignored or obscured, as are the contradictions and deficiencies of 'public service' broadcasting in Britain.

The most damaging effect of the 'mythos' of public service television, however, is not that it distorts the picture of American television. Rather, it is that the public is misled into accepting the 'virtues' of public service broadcasting and governmental intervention without public awareness of: (i) the full range of

Table 1COMMON FALLACIES ABOUT AMERICAN/DEREGULATED TVProgramming

- American TV is 'all the same', a homogeneous output of bland, predictable sitcoms, police shows and 'wall to wall Dallas'
- There is less 'serious' or 'high brow' programming than in Britain, eg documentaries, informational, educational, current affairs, cultural, and minority television
- The greater the amount of commercial television, the more homogeneous and less serious the programme output
- There is less diversity or 'genuine choice' in American television

News and local service

- Commercial television offers less news and informational programmes than public service TV
- Regulation is needed to ensure adequate amounts of these programmes
- American television is all network or 'national' TV with little service to local communities
- Commercial incentives and lack of regulation reduce 'localism'
- Strong commercial networks do not allow room for individual local or regional stations, which cannot compete

Advertising

- There is too much advertising on American TV
- Commercial television is not 'free': viewers pay for the advertising in more expensive products
- Without restrictions, stations feature non-stop advertising
- Advertising revenue is insufficient to finance new channels or networks
- There is inadequate finance to support local or independent stations

Table 1 (continued)New media

- Cable television is all 'second-hand' programmes and re-runs
- Only a portion of the U.S. has access to cable TV
- Except for new urban cable systems, most subscribers receive only a few additional channels
- Fee-based services reduce the amount of 'free' TV

Market forces and regulation

- Any benefits of the American system have come from government regulation
- Regulation is needed to protect or further 'the public interest'
- The profit motive reduces risk-taking; companies 'play it safe' rather than try anything new
- Multiple ownership of television stations by the same company affects programme bias and restricts diversity
- Regulation is essential to promote 'balance' and fairness on TV
- Deregulation results in a reduction of 'public service' programming
- Regulatory authorities are benevolent and act in the public interest

Other

- Americans view British television as the 'creme de la creme' and envy the public service broadcasting structure
- American experience is irrelevant to Britain and Europe

costs imposed; (ii) the additional television choice and alternatives foregone; and (iii) the knowledge that many of the virtues of public service broadcasting are present even in a relatively unregulated environment. The pervasiveness of this mythos is due in part to ignorance, but also to calculated misrepresentation by vested interests.

It is essential to separate fact from fantasy, to debunk a number of prevalent assumptions about American television, and to question the standards and premises on which judgements are made, in order to promote more informed decision-making on the future of television in Britain. For virtually 'every scrap of available evidence' not only refutes the largely unsupported claims of the sort quoted earlier, but instead supports three contrary propositions - specifically, that:

1. American television features a greater variety of programme choice than anywhere else in the world. Not only does this include an astonishing quantity and variety of entertainment programming, with more channels and longer programming hours, but also that claimed as the special province of 'public service' broadcasting - eg news, public affairs and minority interest television.
2. Virtually all the benefits of American television - eg in terms of programme offerings, new technology and economic development - are due to market forces, which means: competition and the profit motive. The corollary, supported by several decades of experience, is that regulatory efforts have generally inhibited television's growth, service to the public and economic benefits.
3. America's relatively free market structure serves the needs of a free society more appropriately than that of a highly regulated public service broadcasting system. It provides scope for more outlets, independent and controversial viewpoints, and local 'grassroots' service, with less opportunity for government abuse - in contrast to the paternalism, entry barriers and greater government role in public service broadcasting.

The 'mental map' of American television pictured by most today resembles the first maps of North America created by the earliest explorers: there is so much incorrect or missing from the picture that it requires almost total re-drafting. While it is possible here to re-draw only some of the most general distortions and 'blind spots', it is nonetheless hoped that even a brief glance at the American television landscape will dispel much of today's 'common wisdom' with common-sense and self-evident realities.

II. TELEVISION CHOICE

Perhaps the simplest way to illustrate America's vast programme choice is a glance at Table 2, listing the 20 largest cable programme networks in the U.S. It is difficult, if not impossible, to take seriously any claims of American television homogeneity, 'wall to wall Dallas' or 'lack of genuine choice' with the presence of so many, and such diverse, television programme services.

Furthermore, these represent less than one-third of just the national programme services available to cable television. There are, in fact, close to 70 national cable programme networks currently operating - plus more than two dozen nation-wide audio ('cable radio') and text-on-screen services - all delivered from a dozen private commercial satellites. Those carried on individual cable systems are usually supplemented by locally-originated, and sometimes regional, programme services as well.

How can such choice be ignored by critics of American television? Apparently quite easily, in the first place, since viewers outside of America have no exposure to these market realities. But even if evidence as to the actual quantity and variety of American television is discussed, criticism often reverts to a number of secondary or 'fall-back' fallacies. For instance, it may be claimed that, while these programme services do indeed exist:

- only a small proportion of cable systems carry them, or
- they are available only to the few Americans who have cable television in their area, or

TOP 20 CABLE NETWORKS

(RANKED BY NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS)

| | VIDEO SERVICE | PROGRAMMING | DATE SATELLITE SERVICE BEGAN | CATEGORY 1/ | SYSTEMS | SUBSCRIBERS |
|-----|--|--|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1. | ESPN Bristol, CT | Sports events/programming; business news | 9/79 | B/A | 17,000 2/ | 46.1 million 2/ |
| 2. | CNN (Cable News Network) Atlanta, GA | 24-hour news & special interest reports | 6/80 | B/A | 11,000 2/ | 44.0 million 2/ |
| 3. | Superstation TBS (WTBS) Atlanta, GA | Independent station: movies, sports, original & syndicated shows | 12/76 | B/A | 12,635 2/ | 43.4 million 2/ |
| 4. | USA Cable Network New York, NY | Family entertainment & sports programming | 4/80 | B/A | 10,100 | 42.0 million |
| 5. | MTV (Music Television) New York, NY | 24-hour, all-stereo video music programming | 8/81 | B/A | 4,590 | 39.4 million 3/ |
| 6. | The Nashville Network New York, NY | Country music & sports programming | 3/83 | B/A | 6,100 | 38.0 million |
| 7. | Nickelodeon New York, NY | Entertainment for kids | 4/79 | B/A | 5,670 | 37.9 million 3/ |
| 8. | CBN Cable Network Virginia Beach, VA | Entertainment, family programming | 4/77 | NC/A | 7,905 | 37.2 million |
| 9. | Lifetime New York, NY | Information & entertainment especially for women | 2/84 | B/A | 3,700 | 36.0 million |
| 10. | The Weather Channel Atlanta, GA | Local, national, regional, & international weather | 5/82 | B/A | 3,200 | 33.0 million |
| 11. | C-SPAN Washington, DC | House of Representatives & public affairs programming | 3/79 | B | 2,700 | 33.0 million |
| 12. | NICK at Nite New York, NY | Entertainment for young adults | 7/85 | B/A | 3,860 | 31.5 million 3/ |
| 13. | Headline News Atlanta, GA | Round-the-clock half-hour newscasts | 1/82 | B/A | 4,000 2/ | 30.0 million 2/ |
| 14. | A&E Cable Network (Arts & Entertainment) New York, NY | Entertainment: series, theatre, film, music, dance | 2/84 | B/A | 2,500 | 30.0 million |
| 15. | The Discovery Channel Landover, MD | Nature, science, technology, history, exploration | 6/85 | B/A | 2,700 | 29.4 million |
| 16. | WT-1 New York, NY | 24-hour video music programming | 1/85 | B/A | 1,715 | 24.7 million 3/ |
| 17. | WGN Chicago, IL | Independent station: movies, sports, series | 11/78 | B/A | 10,810 2/ | 24.2 million 2/ |
| 18. | FNN (Financial News Network) Santa Monica, CA | Live financial & business news | 11/81 | B/A | 1,850 | 22.75 million |
| 19. | FNN/SCORE Santa Monica, CA | Live sports news & financial data | 4/85 | B/A | 1,150 | 19.2 million |
| 20. | Cable Value Network Plymouth, MN | Home video shopping | 5/86 | NC | 1,730 | 18.5 million |

1/B - basic service; small fee/per subscriber paid by operator; usually no additional fee paid by subscriber// A - service accepts national advertising// NC - no charge to subscriber or operator// P - pay/premium service; per subscriber fee paid by operator; subscriber pays added fee

2/Includes SMATV affiliates as well

3/Based on A. C. Nielsen data

SOURCE: NCTA National Cable Network Directory, March/April 1988

Data received from services; audio and text services not included; system figures have been rounded off.

- the programming is all 'second-hand' or 're-runs' anyhow, or
- they are all expensive subscription services, unaffordable to most

Or the 'last-ditch' fall-back may be used: that it is 'free' broadcast television to which critics really refer when discussing the American market, since (they say) this is how most viewers receive their television, and it is this 'traditional' television service which remains an undisputed wastland.

Let us consider these claims briefly.

Cable Television

First of all, cable television is not just a peripheral part of the American television landscape. It is, in fact, the dominant form of television distribution in the U.S.

Market size. Less than half of America's television homes now receive their television via broadcast aerials: as of August 1988, some 52 per cent were cable subscribers. Furthermore, cable television is available not to a minority, but to more than four out of five, American homes, and of those offered cable service, about two out of three homes subscribe - a total of 45 million homes at the aforementioned date.

While it is true that no individual cable system offers every available programme network, even the smallest of those listed in Table 2 is in no less than 40 per cent of cable homes, while most of the Top 20 are in more than 70 per cent of cable homes and the largest are in almost every cable household. Network growth is swiftly outdating these figures as well: the Arts & Entertainment network, for example, had gained another six million homes by September 1988, bringing it into some 8 out of 10 cable homes.

Also, some programme networks, by their specialist nature, do not seek or expect carriage on every cable system. Black Entertainment Television (BET), for instance, is less likely to be found outside areas where its minority audience is located. At March 1988 the channel was however available on cable systems

with more than 17 million subscribers (close to 40 per cent of cable homes), many of which are located in and around urban areas with a large minority population.

First-run programming. Claims that cable programming is all 're-runs' are clearly false. Most of the programming of news and information channels - eg Cable News Network, Financial News Network, Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network, Headline News - is not only original but live. These total tens of thousands of programme hours per year. Sports and premium film channels are also major contributors to new programming, the latter essential to the financing of new production for the cinema as well.

The more cable networks grow, generating a larger revenue base, the more they are increasing the amount of original and exclusive programming carried. The general entertainment USA Cable Network, for instance, has commissioned 24 original 'made-for-cable' movies which premiere beginning April 1989; this is above and beyond the channel's current \$250 million commitment to produce and acquire programmes never before seen on American television.

The Arts & Entertainment cable network, which offers 24 hours a day of distinctive drama, documentaries, performing arts and comedy from around the world, will co-produce more than 104 hours of special presentations and series in 1989 - an increase of over 60 per cent from its current level.

The Discovery Channel, which offers 18 hours a day of documentary programming in five categories - nature, science, technology, history and exploration - is also increasing its level of original and exclusive television in America. Among its innovative programming in 1987, 70 per cent of which had never before been seen on American television, was the transmission of more than 60 hours of Soviet television in one week. During the Moscow Summit, the channel also carried the main Soviet nightly newscast with same-day translation for five days.

Fees. Cable television is, as some critics deride, indeed a fee-based service: in 1987 the average rate was \$13.27 per month. In considering the value of this fee, however, critics and viewers would do well to consider the number and

type of channels Americans receive at an average yearly subscription of approximately £94 - less than the annual cost of a quality newspaper in Britain - on an optional basis, compared with those supplied by a compulsory license fee of over £60 in Britain. As is evident, cable subscribers will not find any shortage of the news, arts, documentary or cultural programmes considered an intrinsic part of public service broadcasting - plus much more.

It should also be noted that a number of programme networks do not charge cable operators a fee and can be received without a subscription fee via a home satellite dish. Approximately 2 million homes receive additional television this way, many of whom also pay for the 'scrambled' fee-based channels. Furthermore, some of these satellite programme services beginning to expand on a 'free over-the-air' basis via new 'low power' television stations.

Broadcast Television

If claims about cable television are so clearly fallacious, what of 'free' broadcast television? With more than half of American homes on cable, some suggest 'traditional' television must be all the more 'impoverished'.

The fact is, that while cable and other new distribution methods have expanded the television choice of Americans vastly beyond that of traditional broadcasting, there is still a significant - and growing - selection of free over-the-air television, including local, informative, and minority interest programming.

More channels. Whereas British viewers have a choice of four broadcast channels, more than 70 per cent of American homes can receive nine or more over-the-air channels. Viewers in large cities can choose from around a dozen. And lest it be claimed that this is the result of 'depriving' other homes of any broadcast service, 97 per cent of American homes still receive more channels than Britain, at least five, excluding cable and satellite services.

More hours. Besides more channels, American viewers can also find more hours of output on broadcast television than their foreign counterparts, and a greater variety of programmes at different times of the day - or night.

In New York, for instance, seven of the area's dozen broadcast stations operate 24-hours a day: the three network stations ABC, CBS and NBC; three independent television stations; and the noncommercial public broadcasting affiliate. Each night these offer a total of 28 hours of broadcast programming between 2 and 6 a.m., compared to four hours on ITV - the only 24-hour broadcast channel in Britain (and only since 1987) - and perhaps an hour on Channel 4.

More variety. To underscore the programme choice available on broadcast television, let us focus on the above stations solely during the hours of 2 to 6 a.m. on a typical weeknight (3 August 1988).

Among the 28 hours broadcast one could find a total of 9 hours of purely 'informative' programmes: 'Nightwatch', four hours of news and current affairs on CBS; 30 minutes of local news on the ABC station; 'Independent Network News', 30 minutes, on independent channel 11; and four hours of news, science, nature and other documentary programmes on the noncommercial public station WNET. To this 'serious' menu another 19 hours of entertainment programmes could be added, including three different films, several chat shows, a number of comedy and adventure series, and even a home shopping service.

Can there be any doubt as to which market offered the greatest viewer choice - and this in the middle of the night, excluding the 35 channels of cable television available to New Yorkers?

It should be emphasised that the American television viewer is offered choice within as well as between programme types. With regard to 'breakfast' television, for example, New Yorkers could tune into three broadcast network programmes (as in most American communities), offering further viewer choice as to the presenters, guests, news and overall style of the programme preferred - or any of the following non-network broadcast programmes at 7 a.m. on the same day as above:

- Good Morning New York (local two-hour breakfast programme)
- Ohayo! America (two-hour Spanish language breakfast programme)
- Beverly Hills Teens (cartoon)
- Sesame Street (children's educational)
- Yoga (health/fitness)
- El Tesoro (Spanish language cartoon)
- Success-N-Life (religion)
- Cisco Kid (western)

In terms of total programme output, the American television market presents a mind-boggling sum. Whereas the combined output of BBC1, BBC2, ITV (including TV-am) and Channel 4 totaled less than 24,000 hours during 1987, this was exceeded in New York by either the three commercial network or the three 24-hour independent stations alone. Taking all New York broadcast stations into account, including another five which transmit approximately 18 hours a day, the total broadcast output in New York is around 95,000 hours per year, almost four times the amount of broadcast television available in London.

If cable television is taken into account, the total is several times greater. Subscribers to Manhattan Cable, for example, receive up to 35 channels, most operating 24-hours. Excluding the channels offering pay TV, the output of programming available in cable homes exceeds a quarter of a million hours per year.

Other programme comparisons

Innumerable additional programme comparisons can be made between the American and British markets, all supporting the extraordinary choice of the former, both within and between programme types.

The total amount of current affairs and general factual programmes broadcast on ITV, for example (14:22 hours:minutes per week average in 1987), is exceeded by CBS television's 'Nightwatch' alone (20 hours per week). To this can be

added CBS' other current affairs and general factual programmes (including three hours per week in prime time), the output of all other broadcast channels, and such dedicated cable networks as The Discovery Channel and Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network.

With regard to religion, one can find more than six hours of programmes - over 300 hours per year - just on New York's broadcast stations on Sunday mornings. This compares with a total annual output of less than 200 hours on BBC1 and BBC2 (combined), and a total British public service broadcasting output of less than 400 hours annually. To the American figures can be added a variety of religious programming on broadcast channels at other times, several dozen full time religious broadcast stations, and seven satellite distributed religious cable networks.

Ethnic and racial minority tastes are served by a variety of outlets. For instance, more than 80 per cent of Hispanic Americans can receive at least one Spanish language broadcast television station; some receive two. In addition, Spanish programming is carried part-time on other broadcast channels and full time on two satellite distributed cable networks. Cable's Black Entertainment Television network features news, films, musical specials, black college sports and music video shows 24 hours a day. National Jewish Television is another cable service offering cultural, religious and public affairs programmes for the Jewish community on Sundays.

Where there are sizeable ethnic communities one can find a variety of other specialist programming. During a typical week in August 1988, for example, New York television featured at least 10 hours each of Korean, Chinese and Japanese television programmes.

Educational and instructional programming on broadcast television is offered principally through America's 322 noncommercial public stations. On weekday mornings, for instance, one can find approximately 3 hours of pre-school programmes alone (780 weekday hours per year) - compared to ITV's combined total of about 314 hours of pre-school, school, children's informative and adult

education programmes for all of 1987. With regard to cable/satellite services, there are two nationwide dedicated educational networks: The Learning Channel (20 hours per day), and Mind Extension University, offering college level 'telecourses' for credit. Many individual cable systems also have local educational channels; in New York, for example, there is CUNY-TV, a 16-hour per day City University cable television channel.

News and local programmes

Table 3 provides one last, important example of the contrast between American and British television choice, specifically in the area of locally produced news. This has been chosen precisely because of the oft-heard 'threats' to local service and informational television posed by a deregulated, commercial marketplace.

How impoverished are Americans compared to the viewers of highly regulated and subsidised public broadcasters?

- Whereas London viewers can obtain locally produced news on two public service channels, ITV (Thames) and BBC1, New Yorkers can choose from five metropolitan-wide commercial broadcast stations alone (plus news on Spanish language stations, public television, and cable systems not included here).

- The locally produced news available to Londoners on weekdays totals 90 minutes. On New York's commercial channels there is close to seven times this amount - some 10 hours of locally produced television news - after adjusting for commercials, previews and other non-news material in and around news programmes.

- Whereas most local news in London is in 5 or 10 minute 'bulletins', except for a 25-minute early evening segment, New Yorkers can view newscasts scheduled in segments of between 30 minutes and 2 hours long. Furthermore, New Yorkers commonly have a choice of up to three competitive newscasts during the same viewing period; in London, no choice between locally produced news programmes is available at the same time.

Table 3

Locally—Produced Television News Programmes: London and New York
(Tuesday 16 August 1988)

London (1)

| | <u>BBC1</u> | <u>ITV (Thames)</u> |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 8.55 a.m. | 5 min. | |
| 9.25 | | 5 |
| 10.25 | | 5 |
| 12.55 p.m. | 5 | |
| 1.20 | | 10 |
| 3.25 | | 5 |
| 6.00 | | 25 |
| 6.35 | 25 | |
| 10.30 p.m. | | 5 |
| Totals | 35 min. | 55 min. |

New York (2)(3)

| | <u>WCBS 2</u> | <u>WNBC 4</u> | <u>WNYW 5</u> | <u>WABC 7</u> | <u>WWOR 9</u> |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Pre-noon(4) | 10 min. | 10 min. | (4) | 10 min. | |
| 12.00 p.m. | 30 | | | | 60 |
| 5.00 | 60 | 60 | | 60 | |
| 6.00 | 60 | 60 | | 30 | |
| 7.00 | | | 30 | | |
| 10.00 | | | 60 | | 60 |
| 11.00 p.m. | 30 | 30 | | 30 | |
| Post-midnight | 30 | | 30 | | |
| Totals (3) | 220 min. | 160 min. | 90 min. | 160 min. | 120 min. |

TOTAL LOCAL NEWS LONDON: 90 minutes (1-1/2 hours) on 2 channels
 TOTAL — NEW YORK: 750 minutes (12-1/2 hours) on 5 channels
 (Less non-news material) (3) 600 minutes (10 hours)

Source: Raymond B. Gallagher, from local television listings

Notes to Local News Table:

- (1) No local news is transmitted on BBC2 or Channel 4
- (2) Local television news is also broadcast in New York by additional Spanish-language and public broadcasting channels, by stations reaching only a portion of the market (eg Long Island), and cable systems
- (3) New York totals include non-news material (eg commercials, schedule previews, public service announcements) before, during and immediately following news broadcasts. Actual news totals are estimated in parenthesis by deducting a conservative 20 per cent of programme time.
- (4) Probably underestimated. Network 'breakfast' and morning news programmes offer several 'cutaways' for local news bulletins. WNYW 5 also offers a two-hour local breakfast programme 'Good Day New York' not included in totals.

- As a percentage of total daily programme output, locally produced news on the commercial New York stations (after adjusting for commercials etc) ranged from 5 per cent to 12 per cent, with three of the five stations at more than 10 per cent of output. In comparison, locally produced news in London comprised less than 4 per cent of BBC1 or ITV's daily programme output.

- Even more astonishingly, the amount of locally produced news on each of the New York stations exceeds the total amount of national news on the BBC, ITV or Channel 4 (in percentage or absolute terms), as well the total production for all local interests (news and non-news) of virtually any BBC or ITV region.

If all locally produced New York programmes were included, as well as national news and public affairs, the American proportion would be even more striking. To illustrate this: the IBA Annual Report 1987-88 indicates that the proportion of 'informative' programmes on ITV (eg news, current affairs, arts, religion, education) averages 32.9 per cent of output, excluding breakfast TV. Yet in America, several studies of television output during the late 1970s and early 1980s found the proportion of commercial broadcasters' similar 'informative' programmes (classified as 'non-entertainment' programming) averaged between 29 and 32.5 per cent - only slightly less than ITV's present average, but still higher in absolute terms due to the greater number of American channels.

To illustrate a more current example, this author's analysis of WCBS-TV (channel 2) in New York, on a typical weekday (Thursday 4 August 1988), indicated that approximately 43 per cent of the station's schedule (excluding breakfast TV, to keep the figures comparable with ITV) was devoted to similar 'informative' programming. Furthermore, analysis of a typical Sunday schedule, when a greater amount of public affairs programming is usually offered, found some 13 hours or close to 58 per cent of the output (excluding breakfast TV) dedicated to 'informative' programmes. Both figures indicate a far greater proportion of 'public service' type programmes on the commercial American channel than with the highly regulated public service broadcaster.

III. TELEVISION IN A FREE SOCIETY

Far from impoverishing its citizens, America's relatively free market television structure serves the needs of a free society far more appropriately than that of a highly regulated than that of a highly regulated public service broadcasting system like Britain's. The former provides scope for more television outlets, local 'grassroots' service, independent programming decisions, few barriers to entry, alternative news sources and 'press rights' to express controversial viewpoints, with far less opportunity for governmental manipulation of the medium — in contrast to the paternalism, entry barriers and greater governmental role in public service broadcasting.

Television outlets. Britain's television allocation policies have created both an artificial scarcity of television outlets and (except for ITV to some degree) an unnecessarily powerful centralised structure. This has given individual television channels more social influence than is merited, especially compared to other media, and reduced the number of media 'voices' otherwise available to a free society.

The American public, in contrast, has access to far more television outlets than daily newspapers, not just within an individual community (as previously described) but in terms of the nation's collective 'media voices' as well. Close to 1,400 individual broadcast stations are licensed on a local market basis, with more than 250 others approved. Furthermore, there are an almost equal number of new 'low power' television stations licensed — some 1,700 — with around 400 already on-air. The latter, broadcasting to a smaller market radius, could eventually total up to 4,000 individual outlets.

More than 8,000 individual cable systems serve over 23,000 American communities, with hundreds more approved. In addition, there are single and multi-channel microwave television systems being licensed on a local market basis, and nine firms have been authorised to provide direct broadcast services for small dish reception by the mid-1990s, each planning between 8 and 32 channels of television service.

Market entry. There are few barriers to entry in the American television market compared to Britain. Religious organisations, racial and ethnic minorities, and other groups may - and do - own and operate their own television services, and these opportunities are increasing with the growth of such outlets as low power television.

Britain's artificially scarce television outlets, on the other hand, make it difficult for (say) the nation's West Indian or Asian minorities to control their own broadcast service (eg unlike Hispanic Americans). Therefore, these groups must generally rely on 'filtered' programme segments offered and controlled by public service broadcasters to serve their interests. From an American perspective, it is also antithetical to a free society that religious entities are actually prohibited from owning a television station or cable system in Britain.

Local 'grassroots' service. The transmission of all but direct satellite services on a local market basis allows far greater potential for 'grassroots' service and local responsiveness in American communities than is allowed in Britain. As previously discussed, this capability is used extensively for such programming as locally produced news.

Responsiveness to local interests, however, does not have to mean the provision of locally produced programming. Local interests may be even greater for bought-in programmes, broadcast network or satellite 'feeds', or even subscription television service. The American market structure, however, focuses the assessment of local needs at far more of a 'grassroots' level than in Britain, with service providers aware that competitors will continually seek to identify unserved or underserved local needs.

American broadcast stations are located in more than 200 separate geographic markets, many far smaller than the 12-14 regions the BBC and ITV each serve. In fact, close to 60 of America's broadcast television markets serve less than 100,000 homes - excluding even smaller low power television communities. Cable operators also must assess which services are of interest to the public at a far smaller community level; around half (over 4,000) of the nation's cable systems actually serve less than 1,000 subscribers, while not even 15 per cent serve more than 10,000 subscribers.

With only two channels offering limited local (actually regional) programming in Britain (BBC1 and ITV), and neither having to compete for finance (each having a respective monopoly of the license fee and advertising), it is questionable how developed service to British communities really is. Indicative of this is the relatively small difference in local output between the commercial television regions in Britain. The smallest region - the Channel Islands - featured over five hours per week for its 120,000 viewers in 1987, while the largest - London - offered just over seven and a half hours per week for the same period, but for almost 10.5 million (87 times as many) viewers.

Independent programming decisions. American television stations, contrary to much myth, are not controlled by the commercial broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC). These companies are in fact limited to a maximum of 12 individual stations with no more than 25 per cent of the nation's television homes. The majority of the stations which carry their programmes (around 200 for each network) do so on a voluntary commercial basis. Furthermore, they are free to supplement (or pre-empt) the network schedule for locally produced or bought-in programmes, to switch affiliations, or to act as free independents as more than 300 other broadcast stations do.

The programming decisions of American broadcasters are therefore independently derived and made on the basis of local needs and market forces. In contrast, Britain's public service broadcasters are required to serve the government's (or its appointees) vision of the 'public interest' in television, with requirements for programming categories, approval of schedules and so on, and little competition. It is virtually impossible for a BBC or ITV region to 'opt out' in order to serve its public on a similarly independent basis.

Alternative news sources. Local news has been well documented above. At the national level, the provision of television news in Britain has been a government-created duopoly of the BBC, for its two channels, and Independent Television News (ITN), for ITV and Channel 4. In America there are far more alternative sources of news, as befits a free society, eg: the news divisions of ABC, CBS and NBC; Independent Network News (INN), available on more than 100 independent stations; news on the Public

Broadcasting Service; plus such 24-hour cable and satellite services as Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN) and Headline News, the Financial News Network (FNN), the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) and NBC's forthcoming Consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC).

C-SPAN offers two entire channels providing live coverage of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, as well as other public affairs programmes and election coverage without parallel in Britain. In contrast to British audience's limited exposure to their nation's political process, particularly at 'grassroots' level, Americans this year have been able to follow developments from local events like the Iowa Democratic Steak Fry through round-the-clock convention and election day coverage.

The Electronic Press

In America, television today is increasingly considered part of the 'electronic press', whose function is identical with that of the printed press. Its relatively free market structure makes it but one of many outlets in a vast information marketplace which includes not only the aforementioned television distribution systems, but also other electronic media such as radio, home video and cinema, as well as the vast spectrum of print publishing. Together, these thousands of information sources compete for the attention of the public and contribute to an overall 'intellectual marketplace'.

While each of these information sources has different technological and economic characteristics, there is agreement that the public does patronise a variety of outlets and, if dissatisfied with one, can always turn to - or, in America, even start - another. Commercial broadcasters are not considered 'unaccountable' since they must provide a reputable service to their audiences, compete with other media and receive constant public criticism.

Fairness doctrine. For these reasons, American broadcasters today have almost equal leeway as the printed press in making their own 'editorial' judgements as to the mix of information, entertainment and advertising provided to their audiences. This was even extended to the coverage of controversial issues on

television in 1987 when the FCC eliminated the 'fairness doctrine', which had required coverage of controversial issues of interest in communities and obligated broadcasters to air contrasting viewpoints on any such issue already covered.

The FCC found that more than 30 years of experience with this regulation confirmed it had the opposite effect of inhibiting the discussion of controversial issues on television, and that on the basis of a substantial record the 'fear of governmental sanction resulting from the doctrine' created 'a climate of timidity and fear', which deterred the coverage of controversial programming.

This 'chilling effect' was underscored by cases of governmental abuse, whereby officials in several Presidential administrations attempted to quell the dissemination of what they viewed as 'extreme' commentary on television, and where many broadcasters - especially small ones - chose not to cover tough local issues for fear of not satisfying the government's judgement of 'balance'.

In responding to those who voiced concern about protecting the 'public interest' from the 'private interests of broadcasters', the FCC noted that critics:

simply fail to understand...that the public's interest in a diversity of information and viewpoints is promoted most when broadcasters are free to cover controversial issues of public importance without fear of subsequent governmental intervention.

As a U.S. Supreme Court Justice noted, the concept of fairness is 'too fragile to be left to government bureaucrats to accomplish.' The FCC also noted that partisan debate is essential in a democracy, and that it is vehement and robust debate which best serves the search for truth.

In the same vein, Supreme Court Justice Byron White stated that while the press is not always accurate or responsible, and may not present full and fair debate on public issues, that:

society must take the risk that occasionally debate on vital matters will not be comprehensive and that all viewpoints may not be expressed... Any other accommodation - any other system that would supplant private control of the press with the heavy hand of government intrusion - would make the government the censor of what the people may read and know.

It is in this, perhaps more than any other, context that America's television market structure serves the needs of a free society more appropriately than that of a highly regulated public service broadcasting system. Indeed, it is questionable to what extent the latter can present controversial issues which challenge those who grant broadcasters' license fees and monopoly franchises in the first place.

It is difficult to envision, say, a Watergate (or Irangate) being pursued with such vigor by the television media in Britain, where public service broadcasters have constantly been subject to inhibiting criticism and reporting restrictions - and, in the case of the BBC, even had staff 'vetted' by the government security services. Similar intervention would be extremely difficult in the American television market today, with broadcasters' increased independence and multiplicity of outlets.

Furthermore, investigative television reporting and issue coverage is a growing feature on the local level in America, serving its citizens democratic needs. There is no such equivalent in Britain, where the television structure and programme 'balance' requirements weigh heavily against similar vigorous coverage of such issues as local government corruption.

IV. WHAT CRITICS MEAN

As this paper has shown, the realities of American television contravene both popular conceptions, and the assertions of many industry observers and insiders. Most of the criticisms commonly heard about the 'inferiority' or 'evils' of American television, and the 'dangers' of deregulation and competition, are in fact sheer fantasy, taken out of context, or based on vague or extremely

subjective criteria. More significantly, the strengths and benefits of American television have generally been ignored or obscured, as have the contradictions and deficiencies of public service broadcasting in Britain.

Contrary to critics' claims, there is no evidence that running free market television companies is a 'grim, remorseless business': witness the 'profit-seeking' companies which are in fact the source of unparalleled news, public affairs, arts and documentary services in America. Nor can it seriously be claimed that British television 'has not been bettered under any regulatory regime abroad', when the American market structure has created economic and consumer benefits only dreamed of elsewhere: witness the state of British cable television.

Not least, there are strong arguments (and concrete examples) that the American television structure has served - and continues to serve - the needs of a free society far more appropriately than highly regulated public service broadcasting: witness the aggressive and unencumbered search for truth by the many alternative American news organisations in the Iran-Contras debacle, versus the harnessing of the British broadcasting duopoly on Zircon, Spycatcher and other controversial issues of public importance.

Yet, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary (of which only a small portion could be presented here), many critics still continue to malign American television and claim that deregulation and competition will 'impoverish' the British public. Let us therefore briefly examine some common criticisms and contradictions, and consider what critics are likely to really mean in maligning American television and maintaining that the medium must be controlled in order to serve the public interest.

Quality and Diversity

Undoubtedly the most common criticism maintained about American television, regardless of the facts and figures presented, is that it somehow offers less 'real' choice or 'genuine' diversity than British public broadcasting, and that deregulation heralds a lowering of television 'standards' or 'quality'. What is usually obscured, however, is the totally subjective nature of such criticisms.

Programme diversity, for instance, applies not just between programme types (eg sport and news offer two different types of television choice for the viewer), but also within programme types (eg how much news, local versus national etc, and which sports are offered). Furthermore, 'real' choice is not the existence of more or different types of programmes for their own sake, but the availability of the particular programmes an individual prefers and the overall value they offer the viewer. Therefore, such factors as the convenience (ie availability of preferred programmes at different times of day and night) and cost of television (in terms of the alternative use of one's time and/or license or subscription fees) must be considered as well. Critics, however, usually obscure this proper context for evaluating television.

The same applies to the subjective notion of 'quality'. For example, the expenditure, talent and production standards used in an individual programme (or across a full television schedule) mean little apart from the overall value offered to the viewer. A so-called 'quality' drama programme (eg with higher expenditure, more 'noted' writers or actors, and 'sophisticated' production techniques) is of little value to a viewer who would actually prefer a less 'acclaimed' non-drama programme not requiring such resources. In fact, the former can even be seen as detrimental to consumer choice if resources could have been redirected to the creation of more alternative programmes which offer viewers equal or greater relative value.

In reality, there are few barriers to providing what critics commonly refer to as 'higher quality' or 'more diverse' television in a relatively free market - if indeed there is a demand for such programmes and viewers find adequate value in them (enough to devote their viewing time and/or finances). Should viewers find existing programme choice bland and boring, or not satisfying their full range of tastes, there is every incentive and opportunity in the open marketplace for competitors to offer more quality or diversity (ie a higher value service). Thus we have seen the development of such services as arts, documentary and news channels in the American market.

By their choices - the ultimate being to 'switch off' completely - the public constantly sends (and programmers are constantly on the look-out for) messages about television's relative value, and services demonstrate their worth among

many possible alternatives. This process, however, is distorted in a highly regulated public service broadcasting environment, where the number of channels is artificially restricted, and where many programmes are required by regulation, as well as subsidised by compulsory license fees or television advertising monopolies.

Who Decides?

What critics usually mean when they condemn the lack of 'quality', 'diversity' or 'genuine choice' on television is that there is not enough of the programming which they (the critic) think people ought to be watching, or what suits their personal taste.

The implication of this attitude was best expressed almost 30 years ago by Sir Robert Fraser, the first Director General of Britain's Independent Television Authority (ITA):

If you decide to have a system of people's television, then people's television you must expect it to be. It will reflect their likes and dislikes, their tastes and aversions, what they can comprehend and what is beyond them. Every person of common sense knows that people of superior mental constitution are bound to find much of television intellectually beneath them. If such innately fortunate people cannot realise this gently and considerately and with good manners, if in their hearts they despise popular pleasures and interests, then of course they will be angrily dissatisfied with television. But it is not really television with which they are dissatisfied. It is with people.

There never has been a true system of 'people's television' in Britain, however, which would reflect the full range and proportions of public likes and dislikes, tastes and aversions etc. Instead there has been a highly controlled television system which gives people some of what they want, but also what paternalistic policymakers and broadcasters think people ought to have. Furthermore, this

structure serves to prevent people from choosing 'too much' of what the controlling elite considers either 'poor quality' programmes or television which is 'unsuitable for British tastes'.

Even today, attempts to create a system of 'people's television' are being restrained by what appears to be a fundamental distrust of the public. This particularly applies to concerns about the possible 'Americanisation' of British television, and the loss or dilution of 'cultural values'. Yet if public service broadcasting truly serves the public's actual needs and interests, the new choices will have limited appeal. And if the British public does choose to view foreign programmes (American or otherwise), or what critics consider 'lower quality' television, or to patronise channels which feature a greater number of advertising messages, the basic fact is that this reflects their freely chosen values, rather than those accepted only through manipulation by an elite which defines and 'freezes' the culture at its particular standards.

Generally, critics' claims - like the principles of public service broadcasting - are full of contradictions and arbitrary distinctions, eg: American television is 'unwatchable' (yet it is essential to limit American imports). British television is the 'envy of the world' (yet Super Channel has made large losses). The expansion of channels in America has meant 'worse' (yet these new services are among the leading buyers and co-producers of British television). Broadcasting is a 'national asset' requiring extraordinary controls (but not newspapers). And the BBC, with its guaranteed income, uses its resources to purchase such programmes as 'Dallas' and 'Neighbours' (the latter repeated twice a day), when these are among those most certain to be provided free to viewers in an open commercial market, and certainly not reflective of critics' cultural aspirations.

In addition to much ignorance regarding American television, many critics and (to the public's detriment) policymakers also display an astonishing degree of arrogance. This is captured brilliantly in the remarks of one member of a parliamentary committee, during 1988 hearings on an issue no less significant than 'The Future of Broadcasting':

It is possible, is it not, to watch television in your hotel bedroom in the United States and switch to about 30 channels and find them all equally mediocre, apart from the odd one which comes in from Britain.

Only to be followed by the chairman's comment that:

I can recall watching the proceedings of a legislative authority on a television programme in the States and I cannot think of anything more boring! Presumably the public would exercise its taste by not watching...

Behind the first remark is the frequently unvoiced attitude that American television is 'mediocre' not on grounds of 'quality' or 'diversity' per se, but because it is simply 'too American'. One gets the impression that these critics would be satisfied only by turning on the American hotel television to find peculiarly British subject matter, with Americans sporting (less 'mediocre') British speaking mannerisms and British styles of programme presentation. Yet 'American' style television is quite naturally what will be found in the largest proportion, from the commonest chat shows (featuring American hosts and largely American topics) to some religious programmes which reflect (only) some Americans' stronger fundamentalist beliefs.

It is also possible that many foreign viewers of American television haven't identified the programmes which meet their interests, due to the initial difficulty in following the programme scheduling and channel structure; some even resent the overwhelming number of channels from which to choose and the need to consult more complicated programme listings. Yet (on a smaller scale) it is no less perplexing for the American visitor in London to discern the nature of Britain's public service broadcasting channels when one finds 'Dallas' on the BBC, 'Dynasty' on ITV and 'Hill Street Blues' on Channel 4.

With regard to the second comment, the American public 'presumably' demonstrates its poor taste in mass, for there are more than 10.8 million regular viewers to C-SPAN, the channel featuring live coverage of the House of Representatives and public policy programmes. This taste for the 'boring' - first-hand monitoring of one's government representatives and public policy-making, with frequent viewer participation programmes - is 'exercised'

for an average of 9-1/2 hours per month, by viewers who vote at twice the national rate, with a 'hard-core' audience viewing 20 or more hours per month. 'Presumably' such arrogance and ignorance in critical public policy decision-making would be more exposed in Britain, to the benefit of citizens and chagrin of politicians, if similar 'American-style' television choice was available. For, among its programmes, C-SPAN televises hearings like the one above from the Congressional committees which make communication policy in America.

Envy of the World?

Both of the above quotes also reflect one the most 'sacred' claims in broadcasting mythology: that British television is the 'creme de la creme' and the 'envy of the world' - including America. Such arrogance could be put into perspective quite easily, however, if anyone considered how few Americans actually would be willing to substitute their television structure and content for that of the British.

It is sheer fantasy to think that the average American would be willing to trade nine or more free broadcast and 30-plus optional cable channels for less than a handful of 'public service' broadcasting channels, and agree to a compulsory license fee equivalent to more than \$100 a year - funds which could be spent on a variety of alternative information and entertainment services, or indeed anything of greater relative value. It would be equally absurd to convince the average viewer of his or her overall 'impoverishment' in television service compared to the British public, and to demonstrate that the switch would bring Americans more 'genuine diversity' or 'real choice'.

For most Americans, there would be a diminution of choice under the 'British model', eg: little overnight broadcasting; the replacement of extensive local newscasts with shorter 'bulletins'; locally based programming on fewer channels in fewer communities; less dedicated programming for significant ethnic and minority groups within a community (eg Hispanics, Koreans, Japanese etc in New York); and less opportunity to tune in to channels dedicated to a specific programme type (eg sport, music, arts, documentaries, children's) whenever the viewer desires. Furthermore, few Americans would be likely to welcome a duopoly of national news services; less scope for covering controversial issues;

the extensive barriers to market entry, competition and innovation of the British system; or indeed the fundamentally greater influence of government and its appointees in determining what is 'best' for the television public.

Exactly who would be the beneficiaries of the British television model in America? Essentially, the same special interests who benefit from the television structure in Britain: (i) the few broadcasters to whom viewers would become dependent, now wielding increased influence and monopoly sources of finance; (ii) ambitious regulators, with greater centralised control over the structure and content of television; and (iii) certain individuals and groups who wish to impose their personal standards of quality and diversity on all television viewers.

It is no accident that these few special interests are those to whom critics and policymakers usually refer, when indeed they can identify Americans who find British television an unqualified object of envy and admiration - eg the noncommercial Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which has long sought funding as guaranteed as the BBC's license fee. For this claim clearly does not hold true for the vast majority of Americans, and it is doubtful that many supporters of even particular aspects of British television (eg 'quality' drama productions) would adopt the latter at the cost of the wider American choice.

Undoubtedly one of critics' greatest fears is that public service broadcasting channels like the BBC will follow the path of PBS as increasingly 'minority' channels - that is, services patronised only by a specific audience segment (eg 'high brow' audiences) or by many viewers only a small portion of the time - because of the success of a freer commercial market in satisfying public preferences. During 1987, public broadcasting stations in America received only 5 per cent of television viewing in homes that did not subscribe to cable, and only 2 per cent of viewing in homes which subscribed to both 'pay' (principally movie channels) and 'basic' cable (eg news, arts and documentary channels).

The traditional dominance of commercial broadcasters, public service or otherwise, is not exempt either. In America, viewership of the 'mass audience' commercial networks has fallen from around 90 per cent in the early 1970s, when there was little alternative choice, to only 75 per cent in non-cable homes in 1987 - due largely to the growth of alternative independent broadcast stations. More threateningly, however, network viewing in pay cable homes

dropped to only 47 per cent in 1987, with the new pay and basic cable channels accounting for 18 and 24 per cent of audiences respectively.

Ghetto or oasis? The American television market demonstrates that viewers, when offered alternative choice, indeed exercise that choice where additional value is presented, thus weakening the hold of 'traditional' commercial and public service broadcasters. This loss of long-established and previously unchallenged power and privilege is one of the central concerns of those cautioning against television deregulation in Britain. Much of this self-interest is however cloaked in terms of 'the public interest'. Commercial broadcasters, for instance, are more than willing to promote and accept 'public service obligations' in a protected regulatory environment: this is a relative 'bargain' for not having to prove their value against others in an open market.

Perhaps the most absurd criticism heard in this context regards the future of the BBC as a possible 'cultural ghetto'. This contradiction in terms clearly gives the game away, for it suggests that rather than offer a television 'oasis' - providing (and financing) only 'quality' or 'diversity' programming otherwise unavailable in the marketplace - the only way the public can be led to what is 'good' (and institutional power can be retained) is by pandering to, and charging for, 'popular' tastes as well.

The Myth of Public Service Broadcasting

In sum, the realities of America's (relatively) free television market challenge not only critics' claims, but many of the fundamental premises of public service broadcasting as well. It is the author's view that the British public, long subject to the mythos of the latter, has been - and largely continues to be - misled about the role and function of television, and the 'benefits' of a public service regulatory structure.

Most British viewers, for instance, pay their compulsory license fee in the belief that their television would not exist, or would be extremely restricted, without public service broadcasting. They are therefore grateful when there is an expansion of choice by public service broadcasters, eg breakfast television, a fourth channel, 24-hour service, an additional regional news bulletin etc. Few

are aware that such services - and many more - would not only still be offered in a freer market, but probably would have been available for many years now.

Nor does the average viewer generally recognise that when a new service like Channel 4 is given a 'mission' (by policymakers) to offer 'complementary' and 'minority interest' television on a national basis, this forecloses the possibility of the marketplace providing more local service or more of the type of programmes already enjoyed.

Even fewer realise that the premises of 'spectrum scarcity' and 'universal service' are among the most fundamental broadcasting myths perpetuated, and that many viewers could have had a fifth, sixth or even seventh channel for some time now. To American eyes it is astonishing that European ministries, ostensibly serving free societies, were actually able to withhold information on spectrum allocation for so many years.

It is as if the public were convinced that there could be only four newspapers in a nation, with a host of similar restrictions in the 'public interest': eg two financed by a mandatory fee on all newspaper-reading homes and two financed solely by advertising; news articles provided only by two organisations; regional news in only two of the newspapers; the fourth allowed to cater to 'minority' tastes only; and each required to be impartial, with no specific editorial opinion allowed.

Indeed, it is equivalent to policymakers looking at the printing press and seeing only their conception of 'public service publishing', eg a 'quality' newspaper - missing the prospect, and subsequent economic and consumer benefits of, books, magazines, circulars, weekly, local and free circulation newspapers, specialised high quality subscription publications and so on.

Unfortunately, unlike publishing, policymakers, public service broadcasters and other special interests in Britain have been able to impose their vision regarding the role, function and content on the rest of society. Consequently, much of the public is, and will remain, convinced they are being regulated (and in the case of license fees, virtually robbed) for their own good - until fact replaces fantasy in American and British television.