

Pull the plug on public tv

At first you might think you've accidentally tuned into some religious television show. There on the screen, after all, are men and women roaring through microphones as they praise the faithful, damn the backsliders, and—closest resemblance of all—beg, plead, cry, and pray for money.

The assumption would be understandable, but false. The figures on-screen aren't Moral Majoritarians, faith healers, prophets, predictors of the End Times, or any of the other exotic creatures that roam the airwaves of the electric church.

No, what you have happened upon is Georgia Public Television.



Every few months those airwaves commandeered by the Georgia Public Broadcasting System are filled with public TV bureaucrats, vote-hungry politicians, entertainers, and various other celebrated and uncelebrated figures, all participating in massive fund-raising telethons for Georgia Public Television. Because the federal government has steadily cut back funding for public broadcasting, Georgia PTV staffers are unable to get their fill from the public trough. Now they must go directly to viewers and beg for money.

Lately these harangues have taken a decidedly unpleasant turn. Some months ago, GPTV aired an obnoxious series of commercials in which viewers who didn't contribute to GPTV were denounced as "free-loaders," and portrayed as criminals and similar unsavory types. Now GPTV bills itself as "Pay TV On The Honor System," with the clear implication that anyone not

sending them envelopes stuffed with cash is somehow "dishonorable."

What incredible gall! Georgia PTV, after all, receives fully three-fourths of its funding from tax dollars. It is astonishing, then, to hear those taxpayers who choose not to fork over *still more* money maligned as "free-loaders," or to hear it implied that they are somehow dishonorable—when they are paying, through their taxes, the very *salaries* of their accusers!

Could anything be more offensive?

Georgia PTV frequently claims it is "viewer-supported." This, however, is clearly hogwash. In reality, the taxpayers who provide the great bulk of GPTV funding are forced to cough up their money—even if they never watch public TV.

GPTV justifies its existence in part by boasting that its programming is vastly superior to commercial television. This, too, is

nonsense. Network, local, and cable offerings easily equal or top GPTV both in quality and diversity, in virtually every category of programming.

Indeed, while some GPTV shows are good—even outstanding—many others are mediocre or second-rate. Some are simply junk.

But this is beside the point: Even if GPTV's offerings were uniformly excellent, that would hardly justify government funding.

Why, after all, should those millions who enjoy quality commercial shows like "Hill Street Blues" or "Kate and Allie," or who delight in trash like "Dallas" or "Dynasty," be forced—under threat of violence or incarceration—to subsidize the entertainment of that tiny minority which prefers symphonies, ballets, and the wailings of Pavarotti?

Why should the infinitesimal number of Georgians who want

to learn how to garden organically, muck about with oil painting, or make noise on the banjo have their lessons *televised* to them at public expense?

Why, indeed, should anyone be forced to pay for another person's television viewing?

The whole concept of "public"—i.e., *government*—television is outrageous. It is elitist and a boondoggle. It smacks of socialism. It has no place in a free society.

If Georgia PTV bureaucrats are really concerned about quality and diverse programming, they should demand an end to government regulation of the airwaves and the cable industry. They should call for immediate slashes in government spending, to leave Georgians with more discretionary income for investment, entertainment, and education.

This would stimulate a flowering of viewing alternatives far beyond anything public TV could ever dream of offering.

I dare GPTV to try to live up to its phony claim that it is "viewer-supported." Let it stop taking tax money.

If Georgians truly support GPTV, then funding will continue, and even increase, if government funding halts.

If not, then I say: let the people's will be done.