[MS-0087.010.006.005]

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Washington, D. C. 20425

March 1, 1971

The Interfaith Centers for Racial Justice in Detroit undertook a project to effect constructive changes within the television industry, with regard to the industry's treatment of minorities. The enclosed letter to the Federal Communications Commission outlines the concerns of Interfaith and the pertinent regulations upon which their case was based. Attached to the letter is a page of excerpts from a description of successes achieved. I am sending you this story for your information, and for your assistance should your group consider similar action.

The full name and address of the organization is:

Interfaith Centers for Racial Justice
10344 Puritan Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48238

William Downs, Executive Director
Phone: 313/345-4350

Another organization has also challenged the television industry with some success, and that is:

Metro Act of Rochester
1261 Dewey Avenue
Rochester, New York 14613

Don Prange, Director
Phone: 716/458-0461

I trust this information will be of value and use to many of you; keep me abreast of your activities and needs so that information I do send can be as relevant as possible.

Sincerely,

Everett A. Waldo

EVERETT A. WALDO
Office of Community Programming

Enclosures

The attached is the substance of a letter sent to the F. C. C. by The Interfaith Centers for Racial Justice, Inc., a community organization of the Detroit metropolitan area. Identifying data have been deleted, but the pertinent information and the two requests at the conclusion are instructive to any group which intends action in this area.

Honorable Dean Burch, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen:

We are a group of citizens widely representative of various segments of the metropolitan area, drawn from the urban and suburban communities of that area, and vitally concerned about the quality of our local television station programming and the employment practices of local stations: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___.

These stations have been alerted to the concern of the black community by a communication from the National Association of Black Media Producers and insofar as we can determine no tangible results are evident from that communication. While sharing the concern of black people, we members of the white community are deeply interested that the television media reflect the multi-racial character of our community and present balanced programming to meet the needs of the total community.

Our preliminary research into the operations of these stations indicates that we have the obligation to immediately petition the F. C. C. to withhold license renewals until a complete review of the renewal applications is accomplished and a public hearing is held.

We have made diligent efforts to examine renewal applications, but these efforts have been hampered by lack of cooperation and

accessibility to necessary materials, even when these materials are supposedly kept "on file locally for public inspection." We refer to these situations:

1. ____ public file DOES NOT include the "Ownership Report." When it was personally requested the citizen was told, "You need a written request to see it." Further requests have only brought such replies as, "I will see about it." And, "I will let you know."

2. Our efforts to obtain copies of the completed license renewal applications of stations ___ ___ ___, and ___ have been delayed by lack of prompt replies due to summer vacations and office backlog. It appears such copies are inaccessible, if available at all.

3. The local office of the F. C. C. in the Federal Building has absolutely no mechanism for handling our requests and no public file for information. It is simply "an engineering office."

4. The Annual Employment Report (Form 395 of F. C. C. 70-545, amending 34 F. R. 9284) which the F. C. C. now requires of all broadcasters is "unavailable" at our local television stations, or "in the process of being completed." It is thus again impossible for our group now to responsibly evaluate a key facet of local operations. We suggest that the newness of this law and the need to provide time to complete the forms necessitate an extension of the deadlines involved (for the broadcasters, and for us, the complainants).

The total impact of these delays and obstacles is a substantial violation of the requirement to keep renewal applications on file for public inspection. We submit that the intent of the law is defeated, unless the full application is available for public inspection for the full period required. This is sufficient reason and justification for the F. C. C. to immediately extend the deadline for filing of complaints.

In addition, we call the attention of the F. C. C. to:

1. Lack of a permanent apparatus for dialogue.

The present means for ascertaining community needs, (i.e., two surveys held only every three years, telephone calls, and letters) is totally inadequate to meet the tremendously complex needs of a major urban area and does constitute a violation of the F. C. C. mandate (60-970) to "make positive, diligent, and continuing efforts to provide a program schedule serving local needs and interests." To remedy this gap we will recommend the formation of advisory councils similar to that already in operation at a television station in another city.

2. Inadequate time devoted to public affairs.

Station ____, for instance, plans no increase in the 4 percent of total time they now devote to public affairs. (See Section IV-A, Part III, #14 of the renewal application.) We judge this amount not only inadequate but even detrimental to the welfare of our community. At a time when racial and class tensions threaten

to further disrupt and polarize vast segments of our area, we stand urgently in need of programs providing in-depth coverage of such critical issues as: school desegregation-integration, police-community relations, youth culture and activities, and the role of various local groups. Therefore, we deem the proposed public affairs programming also grossly limited in content, scope, and relevancy.

3. Unbalanced Programming

The F. C. C. policy statement 60-970, Re: "Commission En Banc Programming Inquiry" delineates fourteen elements frequently necessary to serve community needs and interests. Local stations, such as ___ (see Part III, #14 of renewal applications) which devotes 74 percent of its time to entertainment and sports, fail to offer a proportionate amount of time to these diverse elements.

4. Amount of time devoted to commercials.

We deem 16 minutes out of an hour (as stated by ___ in Part V, #25 of the renewal application) unpalpable to community tastes and wastful in view of community needs.

Besides these overall violations of the F. C. C. mandate to use the air waves "in the public interest, convenience, or necessity," our group is presently engaged in extensive research regarding:

1. Station non-compliance with the Equal Opportunity Act of 1969 (F. C. C. 70-545, amending 34 F. R. 9284 73b) especially in regard to requirements for "positive, continuing program of specific practices" to develop equal opportunity employment. Our efforts, up to this time, have failed to discover any effective training or internship programs for the development of minority group personnel.

2. Need for comprehensive and balanced news coverage.

3. Other areas of broadcasting practice.

This research is being accomplished through:

1. An incisive monitoring study of television station programs.

2. Petition-surveys of community needs and interests in these areas.

3. Definitive studies of pertinent F. C. C. Rules and Regulations, WHEN AVAILABLE.

4. Definitive studies of each station's operation, license renewal applications, and other pertinent documents, WHEN AVAILABLE.

WE DO HEREBY REQUEST THAT THE F. C. C. IMMEDIATELY EXTEND THE DEADLINE FOR FILING COMPLAINTS BY (___) DAYS AND CONSIDER THE (INTERFAITH CENTERS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE, INC.) A PARTY IN THIS LEGAL CONTROVERSY: OR

IN THE ALTERNATIVE, TO CONSIDER THIS LETTER TO CONTAIN SIGNIFICANT DATA TO WARRANT WITHHOLDING THE LICENSE RENEWALS, PENDING FURTHER, MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS FROM US AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES.

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY · 1897 ·

RIPPLE EFFECT

Progress of "Project Talk Back," the challenge to the renewal of TV licensing.

Many blacks have observed a discernible difference in the climate or atmosphere of TV reporting. It is difficult to put your finger on. One example frequently mentioned is the restrain exercised by most TV stations during the police/Black Panther confrontation.

Other examples: moving the program "Profiles in Black" from the relatively obscure time of Saturday evening to Monday nights; a Christman Special, "The Gift," purportedly directed toward the black community; and a new series entitled, "For My People," produced by members of the black community, including Project BAIT (Black Awareness in Television).

There have been some some personnel changes at one TV station. At least one station has opened discussions with the Career Development Institute with the objective of a training program for minority group people to fill technical positions in television.

Excerpted from Keynote Vol. III, No. 1, January 1971, The Newsletter Interfaith Centers for Racial Justice.