

boycotts. Perhaps this is what the liberals should be saying, instead of discouraging the boycotters from doing their thing. Writing in the *New Republic* earlier this year, Timothy Noah suggested that urging a boycott of advertisers instead of television programs themselves "is hypocritical, allowing boycotters to go on watching naughty programs even as they boycott advertisers who support the shows." (Perhaps Noah has a fantasy of Jerry Falwell sneaking downstairs while the rest of his family sleeps, turning the set's volume on low, and sitting down to leer at "Dallas"?) And liberal columnist Ellen Goodman suggested that products should be boycotted only if the ads promoting them were obnoxious. She said that "we should boycott the advertiser if we don't like the ads and boycott the program if we don't like the program. We should just plain turn them off." Goodman added, "Like it or not, the most effective way to change television and leave the Constitution intact is to play the broadcasters on their turf, and the old-time ratings game is the only one they watch."

Leaving aside the fact that the same Constitution which protects the broadcasters' right to say what they want also protects the consumer's right to boycott, there is a serious flaw in Goodman's argument. If you are not one of the relatively few people who participate in Nielsen or Arbitron ratings, turning off your television or switching to another channel will have absolutely no impact on the ratings. But changing your buying habits means sending the one message that advertisers really understand.

You could go further and simply refuse to buy anything advertised on television, switching from national brands to store brands. You would save a good deal of money and no longer be paying for ads that insult you. Think of it as your own little declaration of independence.

And then, if you want to be really free, you could get rid of your television altogether. Join the lucky 1.8 percent of American households who do not have televisions. They read books, listen to music, play cards, talk to one another, and generally live peaceful lives. Walking in a Maryland woods recently, I came upon a bashed-in television set about thirty feet from the path. It looked as though someone, in final disgust, had plopped the set down and then used it as a target for bricks. There, I'm willing to bet, is a happy person. □



FRANK CONTE

Block grants and payroll Charlies

BOSTON'S KEVIN WHITE IS a survivor. Sure it's a cliché, but there's no other way to describe the man. Currently in the middle of his unprecedented fourth straight term as mayor of the once-proud "Hub of the Universe," White presides over a city noted for disintegrating schools, racial violence, and a per capita property tax rate that is still—even after the passage of "proposition 2½" limitations—several times the rate in comparable-sized cities like Cleveland and New Orleans. According to a television poll released in June, 40 percent of White's constituents want him impeached. At one point last spring, confronted by an angry mob protesting his closing of neighborhood police and fire stations, the mayor had to abandon his official car for a less conspicuous vehicle and flee ignominiously into the tunnel under Boston Harbor without pausing to pay the toll.

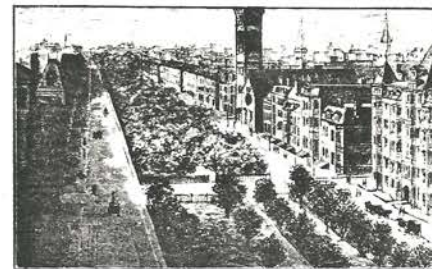
Even Massachusetts Governor Ed King, an extraordinarily unpopular fellow himself, has never been chased through any tunnels by his constituents. Yet King will probably be defeated for reelection next year, while you'd be a fool to bet against Kevin White if he runs in 1983.

How does he do it? How does he hold on to his power in the face of such overt voter hostility? The answer is old and familiar: He's built himself a machine. Ever since 1975, when a relative lightweight named Joe Timilty almost dethroned the busing-battered mayor, White has relied less on his Irish charm and faded image as a reformer, and more on a patronage-fueled system of neighborhood political operatives who

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can turn out the troops on call. *Newsweek* puts the cost of these "payroll Charlies" at \$7 million a year, and this may be a low estimate. Fielding this kind of an army at taxpayer expense requires some creative bookkeeping, of course. Until he was stopped by Superior Court Judge Paul G. Garrity last March, White was planning to funnel nearly \$660,000 through Boston's redevelopment agency to pay sixty-one mayoral appointees and relatives of political workers. Earlier, the judge had ordered the White administration to stop transferring money between city departments without the city council's approval, calling the transfers "mere accounting shams" that disguised patronage funding.

In addition to routinely using city jobs to reward political workers, Boston's mayor keeps his Big White Machine rolling with "block grants"—enthusiasm for which may be the only thing Kevin White and Ronald Reagan have in common besides a fondness for riding around in limousines. The seven-year-old Community Development Block Grants program is a case in point.



Authorized by the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, CDBG was supposed to promote urban revitalization by providing cities with funds for physical improvements. It is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and recalls the model cities and urban renewal programs of Lyndon Johnson. Like many of Johnson's Great Society Programs, it often misses its targets. Urban renewal ended up displacing the poor; community development block grants end up helping big city mayors build political machines.

The problem lies with the CDBG program's structure. Block grants allow local officials to use money as they please. Under Kevin White, Boston has spent about \$150 million in CDBG money. One advocacy group, Massachusetts Community Action, which looked with some care into the mayor's use of CDBG funds, estimated that as much as one-third of this sum ended up in the pockets of the payroll Charlies. When HUD recently monitored the city's CDBG funds, it

"questioned the validity of the entire payroll accounting system."

Boston's Neighborhood Development Agency, created to handle building funds from Washington, serves mainly as a stone wall of bureaucracy and frustration for nonprofit groups applying for grants. NDA is politically staffed and was never approved by the city council. HUD claims the agency misspent almost \$1.5 million: \$657,000 for an intergovernmental relations office that lobbied for the city; \$760,000 for a business services division; \$50,000 for the mayor's "one-stop" neighborhood business plan; and \$4,345 for general administration, including paying a cable TV consultant and TV monitors for the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II. The agency admits that the money used for the papal visit was paid "in error." But Director John Weis makes no bones about NDA's basic nature. "Look," he told the *Boston Herald American*, "by their very nature block grants are a political process. Decision making is at the discretion of local political leaders. Since the program allows the mayor to 'do good things for people' it's just a question of good government being good politics."

ACCORDING TO A 110-PAGE report issued last fall by the now defunct Massachusetts Community Action, Boston has violated several federal regulations in its handling of CDBG money and has overspent statutory limits on administrative costs. Some of the study's findings:

- The city spent \$2.7 million more than the amount approved by HUD on administrative and personnel costs in fiscal 1978-79.
- Of the \$2.7 million, \$880,000 apparently went for fringe benefits during a 1978 tax-classification referendum that White used as a warm-up for his 1979 mayoral race.
- Despite a \$1-million decline in program funds, personnel funding for a housing improvement program was increased by 75 percent during the 1979 election year.
- Administrative expenditures occurred at twice the rate of most program expenditures in fiscal 1978-79, and money had to be transferred into administration at the expense of programs.

The MCA report, which raises question after question about the mayor's use of CDBG funds, is a remarkable accomplishment for a small citizens' action group. Yet HUD officials have refused to

examine it. "We were lightening their work load. We did a tremendous amount of research. All HUD had to do was research the report," the group's director, Michael Kane, said recently. "They should have been delighted; instead, their attitude was puzzling."

One disgruntled city council aide sees

who testified at state labor relations commission hearings last summer were quick to point out how the federal government picked up the tab for patronage. Anthony "Skip" Picarello, a former precinct captain for the White machine, suggested that while he was employed in the CDBG-funded Neighborhood Busi-

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the HUD office as an accomplice to the city's mishandling of the funds. "HUD lets them get away with it," said the aide. "The city winds up contracting with itself. The city creates its own agencies. The mayor pulls about 45 percent for administration. In HUD's eyes the mayor's people are the same as the community groups who administer day care centers. The rules are vague and loose and in the mayor's favor."

"What is clear is that the city has systematically politicized the CDBG process," said Kane, "The mayor is soaking funds to maintain his own machine well oiled at the expense of taxpayers. Computer lists [of applicants for grants] were made available to the mayor and letters were sent to people asking support."

In the mayoral election year of 1979, board members of the Mission Hill Planning Commission—recipient of a \$25,000 grant—were solicited for political support by White aide Rafael Toro. The encounter was less than congenial. "Most of the conversation consisted of his telling me that no one should openly support or work for candidates opposing Mayor White," said former staffer Katie Mills. "He said that the fact that our organization will not support any candidate was irrelevant. 'Everything is political.' He said twice that the city gives us money and that this carries expectations that we will not work against the mayor. He said that the fact I was seen at a rally protesting the mayor's position was not appreciated. He asked us if we would agree not to support opponents of Mayor White. This request clearly extended to Mission Hill Planning Commission board members on their own time, and he implied that he'd screw up our CDBG reimbursements if we didn't go along."

Former White political operatives

ness Program, he received raises as rewards for his work for the mayor—and off city time. Such raises were described as "administrative fringe costs." While soliciting businesses to enroll in the program, which provided rebates to firms renovating storefronts in low-income areas, Picarello asked applicants whether they supported the mayor and his position on the tax-classification question. The implication—no support, no rebates—was fairly obvious. This past June, the feds finally got around to declaring that the business program was "90 percent political"—about two years too late, with \$880,000 down the tubes.

There is also evidence that the White administration replaced community-proposed projects with politically motivated versions. Martin Coughlin, an East Boston community activist and former White worker, told the labor relations commission that his proposal for a satellite teen center was rejected in favor of a city hall proposal. According to Coughlin, the resultant youth center—which opened during the mayor's bid for reelection—was nothing more than a storefront campaign office. "I personally witnessed signs being made and bumper stickers being passed out," he said in a recent interview. The youth center was closed in early 1980 after the mayor was reelected.

WASTING FEDERAL FUNDS is an activity by no means restricted to White's political workers, however. When the city contracts for services with its own departments, the result is often gross inefficiency. Consider, for example, a weatherization program that audits homes for tax credits. It takes one inspector ten days to audit a single house. This is too slow even for HUD, which recently chastised the city for "not carrying out the pro-

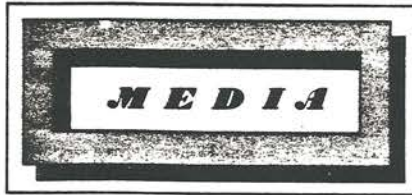
gram in accordance with the schedules in the approved application." These schedules called for "accomplishments of rebates for repairs to 3,142 structures by June 1981," but "a full eight months into the program 91 cases, 2.9 percent of the goal, were complete."

The most recent episode in the CDBG saga is HUD's charge that the city mis-spent nearly \$1.5 million, mostly for salaries for non-block-grant work. Not much may come of it, however. Federal monitors only reviewed the spending practices of the past two years, and in so doing, HUD again neglected the MCA report, which is far more extensive than anything the feds have done to date. Even though the federal investigators found that the city was paying for routine work with CDBG money, they are giving the White administration a chance to come up with evidence disputing the charges. And if such evidence—however inconclusive—is forthcoming, Boston may not have to reallocate the money.

A HUD inspector general has half-heartedly investigated the allegation that city officials used federal money to finance the White machine's tax-classification campaign. The inspector general talked to two White employees and two former White employees—paying no attention to the labor commission hearings—and concluded that no CDBG money was used for such a purpose. MCA's Kane, whose 110-page report still sits in the HUD office, called HUD's meager 15-page report a "White wash."

While the federal bureaucracy and the city of Boston are squabbling over past Community Development Block Grants, there are some serious questions to be raised about the future. The Reagan administration is planning to continue the CDBG program with fewer strings attached. "Reducing federal requirements and intervention" (in the words of an Office of Management and Budget press release) may peel a layer or two off the federal bureaucratic onion, but it won't get local government off people's backs—it will only help machine builders like Kevin White stay on them, at the expense of federal taxpayers.

"When you turn over federal money to the localities they'll abuse it even more. So rather than helping the poor, federal money gets diverted for illegitimate use," says MCA activist Kane, speaking from firsthand experience. "That's something [the Reagan administration] ought to consider." Are you listening, David Stockman? □



JOE FROLIK

El Paso Merry-Go-Round

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, both the public and the journalism profession were excited when the first issue of the *Investigator* magazine hit the newsstands this summer. The publisher was Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Jack Anderson; the "chief investigator" was the flamboyant detective Jay J. Armes, who calls himself "the world's greatest detective." Their magazine, they said, would contain no fuzzy lifestyle features, no gossip columns, no horoscope listings. Instead, every single word would be hard-nosed investigative reporting. Here, truly, was a magazine that would bring the mighty to their knees. Its first press run of 450,000 copies was quickly snapped up.

But what emerged instead was a kind of journalistic Gong Show. One story rehashed Linus Pauling's decade-old claim that vitamin C prevents cancer. Anderson himself revealed that fugitive financier Robert Vesco tried to bribe the Carter administration into going easy on him—hot news, if this had been 1978. Another story tried to prove that the German government warned us about Pearl Harbor in a series of advertisements in the *New Yorker* in 1940 and 1941. (The story did not, however, explain a couple of minor details, like why the Germans would have wanted to spoil the surprise, or, failing that, why they didn't just send a telex to the State Department instead of assuming that FBI cryptographers regularly decoded magazine ads.) The same trends continued in the second issue, which featured as a cover story a long, detailed profile of an obscure and harmless

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American Nazi who died more than two decades ago.

Whether such historical fiction and warmed-over news will keep the public's attention for long is questionable. But the magazine continues to fascinate journalists because of a brewing controversy over the credibility of chief investigator Jay J. Armes—a controversy that may ultimately do serious damage to Anderson's reputation.

As more details of Armes's lies about his background and his unsavory investigative techniques surface, it becomes clear that Anderson lent his name and prestige to the *Investigator* (in return for a potentially lucrative financial arrangement) without checking out colleagues-to-be. Indeed, Anderson admits it; he says he did a "cursory" investigation of Armes and learned that the detective had a reputation for exaggeration—but he ignored those warning signals in favor of laudatory profiles of Armes in such publications as *Newsweek*, *People*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. "I respect those news organizations," Anderson says defensively.

And, he adds, he was impressed by Armes's charm—the detective is a colorful storyteller even by exaggerated Texas standards—and by his struggle to overcome his background. Armes grew up in an El Paso barrio; he lost both hands in a boyhood accident, and now sports a pair of hooks. Yet he became a well-known and undeniably wealthy detective whose clients included actor Marlon Brando and former Braniff International President Thomas Fortune Ryan III. His rise from poverty and his colorful style "had to impress anyone," says Anderson.

So Anderson agreed to go on the masthead as publisher (the fact that he put up exactly zero cash and got 25 percent of the magazine's stock in return could hardly have discouraged him) and the *Investigator* launched a public relations campaign boasting of this journalistic marriage between "the world's greatest investigative reporter" and "the world's greatest detective." And it was this PR campaign that led to all the trouble.

In July, Armes began touring the country to hype the magazine. As he had so often in the past, Armes delighted in pouring out his life story for eager reporters. This time around, he supplemented that tale with talk of how fearless this new magazine was going to be, of how he looked forward to helping investigative reporters ferret out corruption, of what an "unbeatable combina-