

An alternative to TV is for and by the people

THERE'S MORE to television than meets the eye.

Indeed, what usually meets our eyes, assaults our senses, and mocks our intelligence is only commercial TV—the Big Three—the triumvirate of major networks which, this dull and dismal season, I am inclined to call Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

However, there are alternatives. By that I don't mean radio or hot tubs or cold showers—all of which are infinitely more satisfying than any single show on the Tuesday night lineup — but an entire area of Alternative Television. Sometimes it's called underground television or nonbroadcast TV, and sometimes it's called alternative video, but basically it is the videopower-to-the-people movement made possible several years ago by the advent of the very cheap [\$20 for an hour of half-inch tape, reusable], very lightweight [about 30 pounds, recorder and all] portable videotape equipment.

THE MOVEMENT takes many forms and fills many needs —teaching, training, therapy —but perhaps the

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best known of all the innovative, irreverent groups half-inching their way forward in the video revolution is TVTV, the Los Angeles-based group that did the prize-winning hatchet job on the Guru Maharaj Ji and is the first, and only, videotape documentary group to peddle its softwares to big-time network TV.

Not that going big time is what Alternative Television is about. In fact, in Chicago, where there are many ongoing videotape projects — the largest being Videopolis — one small, not-for-profit operation called Communications for Change doesn't care at all if no more than a handful of people see its videotapes. The director of Communications for Change, a mild-mannered social activist named Tedwilliam Theodore, believes that frequently it is not the actual finished videotape but the process of videotaping — video intervention, he calls it — that is useful in organizing for action, changing attitudes, and solving community problems.

IN VIDEO INTERVENTION, which he teaches to

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individuals, social agencies, and to community groups who want to be helped to help themselves, Theodore stresses the very practical, problem-solving potential of videotape.

For instance, a community organizer in Uptown was having difficulty getting a tenants' union organized to protest the sorry condition of their HUD-operated building. An hour before the scheduled tenant meeting, Theodore and his handy-dandy \$2,000 Portapac appeared in the building's courtyard and recorded the residents' complaints, views, and opinions. The magic of television drew the people out, their curiosity got them involved, and before \$10 worth of videotape had played out, barriers had come down, fears had subsided, and the tenants' union had focus.

Later on, Theodore explained, those same organized tenants found they actually could get in to see a top HUD official by waving their videotaping equipment his way; once in, they found his cooperation and responsiveness increased the closer the cameraman came. It didn't matter that it wasn't really a TV news team and that the group had no broadcast outlet for the tape, Theodore says; it was the process that the official found intimidating. And in this case, it helped the tenants' cause immeasurably.

"A GROUP LIKE TVTV might approach this problem by making a videotape documentary showing all the tenants' unions' problems and trying to get it on network TV," says Theodore, **"but that's not how we work. We believe that the tape itself is not the answer, that change will come from the group action—the process—once the group understands power and how to use it."**