



became known as “The Big Red Button”). Whenever he felt a record was really important, he’d make sure the indies were all over it.”

Yetnikoff also couldn’t stand Asher, who’d been brought in by CBS CEO **John Backe** to watch the bottom line, while Walter schmoozed rock stars—and partied as hard as any of them. During Asher’s boycott, Yetnikoff simply threw money at artist managers to funnel to the indies. He wasn’t going to let Asher’s crusade hurt his records.

The decisive and final battle in the war against indie promo came early in 1980, when Asher tried to get **Pink Floyd’s** “Another Brick in the Wall (Pt. 2)” played on Top 40 radio in Los Angeles without paying the indies. The L.A. Sports Arena was one of only two venues (New York’s Nassau Coliseum being the other) where Pink Floyd would perform *The Wall* live that year, and Asher figured getting the single played in L.A. without the indies would be a slam dunk.

He never stood a chance. Not one of L.A.’s Top 40 stations added the Pink Floyd single. Asher’s senior VPs of promotion, **Ed Heins** and **Don Colberg**, smelled blood in the water, and hoped this would end the indie boycott once and for all. It was an important moment for them because they needed the indies to help get their records played, rightfully believing they were at a major competitive disadvantage. Heins and Colberg actually pushed the indies hard to keep Floyd off Top 40 stations.

Yetnikoff’s footprints were also all over the Pink Floyd airplay embargo. There were four L.A. Top 40 stations claimed by three independent promoters at the time: **Joe Isgro**, **Fred Disipio** and Lavinthal and **Lenny Beer’s Musicvision** were L.A.’s major players. When Asher finally folded, most reported and played “Another Brick in the Wall” immediately; it went to #1 at **KFI** three weeks after the add. **KRLA** never did play the record. “The PD thought it was out of format,” said Lavinthal.

Keeping “Another Brick in the Wall” off L.A. radio was the ultimate indie power play. Asher did more than lose the battle

of L.A.—he helped solidify and empower a new network of independent promoters. After the boycott, indie promo money at Top 40 went crazy, and airplay became very expensive.

No one knows who really coined the now-infamous term “**The Network**.” Isgro said it was **William Knoedelseder** of the *Los Angeles Times*. Others credit **Bruce Wendell**, who was known for his extremely cozy relationship with *Billboard* charts director **Bill Wardlow**, as well as with some of the Network indies. Wendell was a colorful character who made a big deal about his friendship with the **Philadelphia Phillies** and their slugger, **Mike Schmidt**. The industry talk surrounding Wendell involved an ex-girlfriend who made off with a huge amount of cash he kept in a safe. The big buzz was over where all that cash—rumored to be in the hundreds of thousands—had come from.

No matter what the indies were called, they were a music industry reality, and they had a very lucrative run until early 1986. That’s when the shit hit the fan for independent promotion, and that’s the summer when *HITS* magazine was born.

1985: MCA, Sal Pisello and Morris Levy

In 1985, **MCA Records** had alleged organized-crime problems. A lot of them were caused by Knoedelseder. For three years, beginning in 1985, the reporter’s *L.A. Times* stories relentlessly hammered away at reputed mobster **Salvatore Pisello’s** involvement with MCA. Pisello was familiar to law enforcement officials as an East Coast mafia figure, who was also known as Sal the Baker, Sal the Swindler and Big Sal.

Knoedelseder inflicted his first real damage on May 10, 1985, when he published the findings of a confidential MCA internal audit detailing the extent of Pisello’s involvement with the record company. It was a 1984 cutout deal struck by Pisello with industry legend and **Roulette Records** President **Morris Levy**, on behalf of MCA, that caused MCA the biggest headaches. Cutouts were considered schlock in the music business, and those who moved them were called “undertakers.” Schlock or not, it was big business.

