

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT**

Cara White	843/881-1480	carapub@aol.com
Mary Lugo	770/623-8190	lugo@negia.net
Randall Cole	415/356-8383 x254	randall_cole@itvs.org
Wilson Ling	415/356-8383 x231	wilson_ling@itvs.org

*Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:*

*www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos*

*Program companion website: www.pbs.org/powertrip*



**INDEPENDENT LENS'S "POWER TRIP"  
AMERICAN POWER COMPANY TRIES TO KEEP  
LIGHTS ON IN FORMER SOVIET REPUBLIC OF  
GEORGIA AMIDST CORRUPTION, HIGH DRAMA  
AND HOT TEMPERS**

*Film by Paul Devlin*

*Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens"*

*The Emmy® Award-Winning Series on PBS*

*Hosted by Susan Sarandon*

*Tuesday, January 25, 2004 at 10 P.M.*

*(check local listings)*

---

*"The highlight of the World Bank's Energy Conference. If you cannot imagine how a movie about electricity privatization could move you to tears, you need to see **POWER TRIP**."*

—JONATHAN WALTERS, ECONOMIST, WORLD BANK

*"As this hilarious film demonstrates, Georgians did not take kindly to capitalism. They resented being asked to pay for their electricity—and who can blame them?"*

—NICK FRASER, BBC

(San Francisco, CA) — **Independent Lens's POWER TRIP** is the story of the tragicomic clash of cultures which explodes when an American energy conglomerate buys the dysfunctional, formerly state-run electricity company in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. Directed by Paul Devlin, the film will be broadcast on **Independent Lens** on **Tuesday, January 25, 2005 at 10 P.M.** (check local listings).

With its rampant corruption, political assassinations and street riots, Georgia, a former republic of the Soviet Union and now an independent nation, is in the words of one journalist, "a basket case." In the old Soviet days, electric power was cheap or free. But things change when AES Corp., the massive American "global power company," purchases the privatized electricity distribution company in Tbilisi.



Flimsy, self-installed wires crisscross every building in Dr. Seussian fashion, as residents steal electricity because they can't afford a \$24/month utility bill (about half the average Georgian's monthly income). At the start of the film in 1999, up to 90% of AES's customers refuse to pay their bills,

holdovers from the former Communist system where the state provided their electricity.

Piers Lewis, project manager for AES, explains the conflict: "AES-Telasi is here to make them pay, and they don't want to pay. But somebody has to pay to fix this system."

AES's initial strategy is to disconnect non-paying customers en masse, in order to compel payment. However, the AES-Telasi offices are then overrun by angry customers, many of whom claim to have paid their bills. Ill-prepared to deal with masses of shouting Georgians, the company soon discovers that many of the customers' payments have been stolen somewhere along the payment stream. As disconnections continue, anger turns to rioting and the managers of AES-Telasi are forced to re-evaluate their strategy.



The erratic supply of electricity to Tbilisi from the National Dispatch is also a tangled knot that Piers Lewis tries to unravel, as he confronts institutional corruption. The winter of 2001 is one of the harshest in memory as dwindling supply has left most of the city with electricity for only three or four hours a day. Angry customers take to the streets almost daily to burn tires and block traffic, protesting against the American company. Corrupt political interests in the Georgian government have diverted much of the electricity supply purchased by AES-Telasi to non-paying industrial customers in outlying regions, leaving Tbilisi in darkness.

Along the way we learn about Georgian culture and society and meet some colorful characters. Datto, the Georgian commercial billing manager is not above temporarily disconnecting an airport just as a plane is landing in order to compel them to pay their debt "instantly." Akaki hosts an investigative journalism show called *60 Minutes* and has dodged death threats. His colleague Giorgi, a news anchor, was not so lucky and was murdered in his apartment after viewing an incriminating videotape.

Just as AES-Telasi seems to be making progress, the Enron scandal undermines the entire U.S. energy sector and AES stock is devastated. Shareholders insist that AES pull out of Georgia, while the U.S. government pressures them to stay, because of the terrorist threat identified in the nearby Pankisi Gorge.



As it explores the implications of a Western-fueled pursuit of globalization and privatization, this surprisingly humorous non-fiction narrative provides insight into today's headlines, while also offering an affectionate and entertaining glimpse into a country as it struggles to rebuild from the rubble of Soviet collapse.

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **POWER TRIP** are available at [www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos).

The companion website for **POWER TRIP** features detailed information about the film, including exclusive filmmaker Q&A interviews, filmmaker and cast bios, Learn More links and resources pertaining to the films' subject matter. The sites will also feature video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

## ON AIR PARTICIPANTS

**DENNIS BAKKE**, co-founder and CEO, president, AES Corporation, defines the purpose of AES business to serve the world with safe, clean, reliable electricity and describes its core values as integrity, fairness, social responsibility, and fun. Bakke resigned from AES in spring 2002.

**LEEKA BASILAIA**, investigative journalist, Rustavi-2 Television, works as a broadcast and print journalist on political stories in Tbilisi, Georgia.

**ALISON EKBERG**, election observer, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, acts as a election official in the Euro-Asian region.

**AKAKI GOGICHAISHVILI**, anchor *60 Minutes*, Rustavi-2 Television, works as an investigative broadcast journalist in Tbilisi, Georgia.

**IGNACIO IRIBARREN**, general director, AES-Telasi, is assigned as successor to Mike Scholey, to helm AES-Telasi in Georgia.

**ALAN JOEL**, project manager, Black & Veetch, installs meter and support equipment in the Tbilisi region as contracted by AES-Telasi.

**IRALKI KANDELAKI**, transition manager, AES-Telasi, is in charge of customer relations and debt collection for residential customers.

**NINO KHONELIDZE**, logistics assistant, AES-Telasi, works as a customer service liaison for Tbilisi residential customers.

**ZAAL KIKODZE**, professor of archaeology, Tbilisi State University, is a professor and farmer who provides social commentary and political insight into Georgia's history and current events.

**PIERS LEWIS**, strategic projects director, AES-Telasi, is later promoted to manager, East Region AES-Telasi, and transitions Tbilisi from the vicious cycle of “no payment—no electricity supply” by implementing a transparent accounting/billing system, remetering, disconnections for non-payment and improved electricity supply.

**NUGZAR OPLIASHVILI**, deputy energy minister, assists David Mirtskhulava in the control of the energy sector and power supply in Georgia.

**DAVID MIRTSKHULAVA**, fuel and energy minister of Georgia, controls the energy sector and power supply in Georgia.

**BILL O'REILLY**, general director, AES-Mtkvari, manages the gas operated Mtkvari Power Plant which supplies the Georgia grid with power.

**ALEXANDER RONDELI**, director, Foreign Policy Center, Ministry of Georgia, provides commentary and insight into the current political situation in Georgia.

**GIORGI SANAYA**, investigative broadcast journalist, Rustavi-2 News, reported on political and corruption stories in Georgia and was assassinated July 2001.

**MICHAEL SCHOLEY**, general director, AES-Telasi, launched AES investment in Georgia to transition the post-Soviet state to a capitalist way of doing business in the energy sector. Scholey was promoted to group manager based in Istanbul, Turkey, overseeing AES business in many countries.

**DATTO TABIDZE**, commercial billing manager, AES-Telasi, manages accounts and debt collection of commercial customers in Georgia.

## POWER TRIP Credits

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/EDITOR/CAMERA  
CO-PRODUCER/CAMERA  
CO-PRODUCER  
CONSULTING PRODUCER  
POST-PRODUCTION PRODUCER  
AUDIO POST-PRODUCTION

**Paul Devlin**  
**Valery Odikadze**  
**Claire Missanelli**  
**Vince Sherry**  
**Tom Reilly**  
**Benny Mouthon**  
**Matt Haasch, Caterini Studios**  
**Pat Donahue**

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**PAUL DEVLIN** (Producer/Director/Editor), is an award-winning filmmaker whose work includes *Slam Nation*, distributed nationally in theaters and cablecast on HBO/Cinemax and Encore/Starz ([www.slamnation.com](http://www.slamnation.com)). His fiction film, *The Eyes of St. Anthony*, is distributed by Tapestry International. As a freelance video editor, Mr. Devlin has been awarded five Emmys for his work with NBC at the Olympic Games and with CBS at the Tour de France. His extensive credits as an editor include commercials, music videos, weekly television shows and sports television including the Super Bowl, World Cup Soccer and the NCAA Basketball Championships, among others. Paul Devlin is also the producing editor (or “Preditor”) on *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme*, broadcast on VH-1 and winner of a Special Jury Award for Documentary Filmmaking at the 2002 Florida Film Festival.

**VALERY ODIKADZE** (Co-Producer/Camera) has been working for the independent and most popular TV channel in Georgia, Rustavi 2 Broadcasting Company, since 1994 as a video producer, director and videographer. For two years he worked for the Georgian investigative television show *60 Minutes*. Odikadze has served as an editor on projects such as the Georgian language adaptation of the PBS animated series *Teletubbies* and has taught students editing at a media school in Georgia. Presently Odikadze works as a full-time producer, editor and videographer for Rustavi 2 Broadcasting Company’s documentary film department.

**CLAIRE MISSANELLI** (Co-Producer) was raised in Pennsylvania, received her BA in Media Communications from La Salle University and attended graduate studies at NYU Film School. Missanelli, who resides in New York City and is a producer, has worked on a variety of projects including **POWER TRIP**, the 2000 National Poetry Slam Finals, *As An Act of Protest*, and James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mr. Charlie* for the National Black Theatre in Harlem.

## ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

**Independent Lens** is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. **Independent Lens** features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: “Watching **Independent Lens**... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don’t always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn’t even know you wanted.” Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). **Independent Lens** is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.



## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series ***Independent Lens*** on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

## ABOUT PBS

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online ([pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet, averaging more than 30 million unique visits and 380 million page views per month in 2004. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.