

Nixon Bent on Regulator Overhaul

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon is planning a drastic overhaul of the federal regulatory agencies. If he carries out his 1968 campaign pledges, a timid hierarchy of reluctant regulators will emerge from the reorganization.

The special interests simply don't like to be regulated, and in return for their campaign contributions, Mr. Nixon sympathized with them in 1968. He wrote a private letter to stockbrokers, delivered a campaign pitch to oilmen and gave personal assurances to other business tycoons that he would end "government harassment."

At stake is the tremendous economic power that the quasi-judicial regulatory agencies wield. The Interstate Commerce Commission, for instance, can authorize billion-dollar mergers between great railroads. The Civil Aeronautics Board decides which airlines will get the choice routes. The Federal Power Commission fixes the rates that millions of consumers pay for gas and electricity.

The Securities and Exchange Commission can put a stockbroker out of business or compel a corporation to withdraw from a stock exchange. And the Federal Communications Commission allocates wave-lengths for radio and television which have become so

valuable that station WIIC-TV in Pittsburgh, for one, was sold to the Cox Broadcasting Company for \$20.6 million though its tangible assets added up to only \$3.8 million.

Backdoor Pressure

The average citizen pays scant attention to these public guardians who are besieged instead by the lawyers and lobbyists of the corporations that are supposed to be regulated. Congressmen have additional access to the commission through back doors that may be closed to lobbyists. A pipeline company seeking a rate reduction or a Wall Street firm accused of stock irregularities will usually hunt up a powerful senator or congressman to put in a word with the right commissioner.

In the name of efficiency, President Nixon is now preparing to remodel and restructure the regulatory agencies. In place of the commissions that now sit in judgment on the special interests, the President would like to appoint single administrators.

Not doubt this would reduce red tape and increase efficiency. But it would also give the President more power over regulatory agencies that are now reasonably free of presidential pressure.

He also wants to combine the three transportation agencies—the Interstate Commerce Commission, Federal Maritime

Commission and Civil Aeronautics Board—into a single, streamlined body. And he would split the Federal Trade Commission in two, separating its antitrust activities from its consumer regulation.

This sweeping reorganization hasn't been announced, but it is being shaped in the back rooms of the White House. It has been recommended by the high-powered advisory council that the President appointed to help him streamline the huge federal bureaucracy. The council is headed by Roy Ash, president of Litton Industries—one of the corporations, incidentally, that doesn't like to be regulated.

While the bureaucracy sorely needs trimming, the public had better keep a watchful eye to make sure the fox doesn't redesign the chicken coop.

Phantom Letter

This column has now solved the mystery of TV Guide's phantom letter assailing newscaster Chet Huntley, who has retired to his boots and blue-jeans out on the wide open spaces of Montana.

Last month, we reported that the editors of TV Guide, for their Aug. 1 edition, had prepared a vitriolic editorial attacking Huntley but had dropped it the last minute. One week later, however, the magazine published a mysteri-

ous letter bristling with language from the unpublished editorial.

The letter was signed by a "P. H. Lyon" of Montgomery, Ala., an elusive figure whom we couldn't locate in Montgomery. TV Guide editor Merle Panitt vehemently denied the letter was a fake.

However, we have now located "P. H. Lyon" who lived in Montgomery some 20 years ago. She is Phyllis Lyon Clemenko, wife of TV Guide's letters editor, Harold "Clem" Clemenko, the same man who swore to us the letter was genuine but had been "impossible" to authenticate.

Reached by this column, Mrs. Clemenko was miffed when we asked her maiden name. "I don't believe I care to talk to you," she said, and she hung up.

Footnote: TV Guide happens to be controlled by Walter Annenberg, the former Philadelphia publishing magnate who is now serving as the U.S. Ambassador to England. Annenberg is a devoted friend of Richard Nixon, who has made no secret of his distaste for certain TV commentaries. Indeed, he had a special dislike, say intimates, for the Huntley-Brinkley show, a feeling that was intensified by quotations attributed to Huntley that Nixon was "shallow." Annenberg was in a position to know how the President felt.