

Tom Braden

# Pat Buchanan's Media Papers

Newspaper editors are loath to devote much space to accounts of their own troubles. The public, they tell themselves, wants to read the news and not about how hard it is to get it.

Maybe that's why the 34 documents made public by the Watergate committee at the time of the testimony of White House speechwriter Pat Buchanan got so little attention. But they ought to be reproduced and distributed free by your carrier boy, because they show how it is possible to subvert the First Amendment. They show how the debate, which our system supposes will precede the free choice and decision-making of our citizens, can be managed by the government. Consider a few excerpts:

A note from Charles Colson to H. R. Haldeman: "It is obvious that the other side is really being hurt as they begin to understand the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) decisions . . . I think it is time to generate again a PR campaign against the Democrats and CBS."

A note from Jeb Magruder to Lawrence Higby: "Get independent station owners to write NBC saying they should remove Huntley now . . ."

From Colson to Haldeman on the subject of his conversations with the presidents of the three networks: ". . . they are damned nervous and scared and we should continue to take a very tough line . . . I will pursue with Dean Burch (chairman of the FCC) the possibility of an interpretive ruling by the FCC on the role of the President when he uses TV as soon as we have a majority . . . It would have an inhibiting effect on the networks and their professed concern with achieving balance."

From Magruder to Haldeman: "Have Rogers Morton charge that the great majority of the working press are Democrats. Have him charge that there is a political conspiracy in the media to attack this Administration . . . Utilize the antitrust division to investigate various media . . . Threat of antitrust action would be effective in changing their views . . . Utilize the Internal Revenue Service . . . Just the threat of an IRS investigation will



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## *White House speechwriter Patrick J. Buchanan*

turn their approach."

There were also some samples of letters Buchanan had drafted at his White House desk to be distributed to various parts of the country and then mailed with fake signatures as letters to the editor. A couple of samples suggest the theme: "To the Editor: The best proof yet of the allegations of Vice President Agnew about the nation's news media was their incredibly arrogant performance before the entire nation last Thursday night. Who in the hell elected these people to stand up and read off their insults to the President of the United States and then ask that he comment?" Or "To

the Editor: . . . When will you people realize that he was elected President and he is entitled to the respect of that office no matter what you people think about him?"

Deceit and intimidation are useful weapons to apply against the First Amendment. Deceit makes it impossible for the public to discuss the public's business on a factual basis; intimidation can be brought into play whenever it looks as though deceit will fail.

Deceit was a success for a long time. That was established from the day White House Press Secretary Ron Zeigler was forced to call his previous

statements "inoperative." But we still don't know how much the Nixon administration kept us uninformed about our own business.

Was intimidation an equal success? That some newspaper reporters, editors and owners were courageous is quite clear and those who were not aren't talking.

But the Buchanan papers make it clear that a government-mounted campaign against the First Amendment can be successful, at least for a time. Against such a campaign, courage is really the only weapon.