



TV Gets Veto Power Over Federal Probers

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WASHINGTON—The television industry was given a veto, incredibly, over appointments to the surgeon general's advisory committee, which is supposed to investigate the effects of TV violence on human behavior. The television moguls immediately knocked seven distinguished scientists off a list of 40 nominees. The blackballed seven, presumably, might not approve of the constant bloodletting that flows through the video tubes and brings a crimson blush to the nation's home screens. Not only was the TV industry permitted to screen the nominees, but two television executives were planted on the 12-man committee. They are NBC's vice president Thomas Coffin and CBS's special research director Joseph Klapper, who now will help determine whether their own networks have been encouraging TV violence.

Robert Finch, the supreme satrap of the sprawling Health, Education, and Welfare Department, has admitted that "members of the (television) industry were given a long list of potential candidates for the (surgeon general's) committee and were invited to indicate any doubts they might have concerning the scientific impartiality of any of the individuals."

In an unpublished letter to Sen. Lee Metcalf, D-Mont., Finch also conceded that "seven out of a list of 40 names" were disapproved by the TV industry.

"The surgeon general," wrote Finch, "did not select individuals to whom there were objections raised by members of the industry."

Finch's office refused to say who had been crossed off the list at the TV industry's instigation. But he acknowledged in his letter to Metcalf that all seven were "men of substantial competence" and "distinction."

Footnote: Of 530 HEW advisory committees, only one other has been screened by the industry it was supposed to investigate. This was the Surgeon General's Committee on Smoking and Health, whose members were quietly okayed by the tobacco industry in 1962. Nevertheless, the committee issued the explosive report that cigarettes cause cancer, heart disease and other health horrors.

Mafia Case Mishandled

The Justice Department has issued a two-page rebuttal declaring there is "no truth" to our charge that its lawyers mishandled a nationally important Mafia prosecution.

The case against Steve Magaddino, 78, the ailing crime king of upstate New York, and nine of his underworld associates, has been delayed, says the Justice Department, by 16 pre-trial motions and Magaddino's medical tests.

A government-selected doctor confirmed months ago that Magaddino's heart wouldn't stand the stress of a trial. The government could have disposed of the motions and gone ahead with the prosecution of Magaddino's co-defendants long ago.

The real reason for the 17-month stall is that the case has become bogged down in endless bickering and bungling, resigna-

tions and reshufflings. The indictment was also so poorly drawn it may make a conviction impossible, and the case is based heavily upon illegal tapes that are unusable in court.

'Indictment Botched'

The indictment against these Mafia figures, major catches if they could be convicted, should have been based on usury, not gambling. A high Justice official not only admitted this to us but commented sourly that the "indictment is so botched we probably can't make the case."

Edward Joyce, a Justice Department prosecutor, admitted that he was sent to Buffalo, N.Y., to handle the case because the Justice task force couldn't get along with the FBI. This admission was heard by Atty. Gen. John Mitchell's press spokesman, who listened in on an extension as an uncomfortable witness.

The department's two-page handout went on to deny our report that U.S. Atty. H. Kenneth Schroeder had been hampered by a feud with task force head Joseph Reiter. When confronted, Department officials admitted they hadn't even talked with Schroeder about the matter.

As for absenteeism, the department now admits its lawyers skipped out of Buffalo, but claims it was always on "official business." Whatever their excuse, they frequently weren't around, and the absenteeism record has been carefully documented by disgruntled lawmen.

This column will print corrections when it is wrong. But in this case, the government lawyers are muffing the prosecution as we reported, and the misstatements have been put out by the Justice Department.

Credibility Gap

President Nixon originally intended to maintain official silence about the shipment of rifles and later strike of American troops into Cambodia. Cover stories were carefully prepared in case leaks should appear in the press.

The United States went to elaborate lengths, for example, to arrange with the South Vietnamese government to take the blame for shipping captured Communist rifles to Cambodia. The truth is that the U.S. handled every detail of the shipments through the American embassy in Phnom Penh. But the South Vietnamese agreed to accept the public responsibility.

The White House even gave some senators the impression that the President would never send troops into Cambodia — at the same time that the troops were preparing for the border crossing.

The President's statement that the drive into Cambodia is essential to safeguard the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam is disputed at the highest levels inside his own administration.

The attempts at secrecy were finally frustrated by detailed leaks from the State Department which forced the President to make a full disclosure of his actions. Originally, however, he had hoped to keep U.S. involvement in Cambodia under wraps in the same way U.S. involvement in Laos was kept secret for years.