

Editor Says Nixon Seeks To Muzzle News Media

By JERRY M. FLINT 20 Nov 69
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ANN ARBOR, Mich., Nov. 19 —The Nixon Administration seeks to intimidate and muzzle the American press and television, Norman Issacs, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, charged today.

He implied that the Administration was trying to whip the news media into a Soviet-style system, one that "says that you support the Government or you go."

In a speech and at a news conference on the campus of the University of Michigan here, Mr. Issacs, who is executive editor of The Courier-Journal and Louisville Times, said that the press and TV news had their faults and there was "a germ of truth" in charges that New York and Washington dominate the news.

But, he said, any Government threat against television station licenses goes far beyond fair criticism and "smacks of intimidation and control." It is, he said, an attempt to "shut off the voices of dissent."

Cites Media Rivalry

"The newspaper and broadcast arms of communications are rivals," he said. "For years they have been openly contemptuous of each other. Yet whatever their differences, they are now driven together as the co-targets of what can only be described as an open campaign by the national Administration to discredit them—and, more importantly, to seek to bring them under some form of covert control."

Vice President Agnew, who attacked television news in a speech last week, "was the spear-bearer of this attack," Mr. Issacs said.

He said that Clark Mollenhoff, a White House aide, and Attorney General John N. Mitchell "would seem to be working together," that George Romney, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, "looks like he's a Johnny-come-lately," and that Dean Burch's "role I can't quite figure out," unless

it was "to make the intimidation" clear.

Mr. Burch, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, "ought to be fired," Mr. Isaacs said, because he is acting as both prosecutor and judge in criticizing television.

'Muzzling' Effort Seen

Mr. Isaacs said: "The Vice President's text disclaimed any intent to legislate against the communications media. But he did appeal openly for public control — and what other interpretation can be drawn than Administration support for such challenges? And with a chairman of the F.C.C. who openly adopts a welcoming stance to such challenges?"

"You have one of two options in analysis of the motives. One is intimidation, the other is control. But is there any essential difference, so long as you succeed? The end result is muzzling of some kind."

And he said of Mr. Agnew and Mr. Burch: "I cannot help but wonder what the substantive difference is between their position and that in practice in the Soviet Union?"

In his speech the editor was critical of the press and television, and some of his complaints were close to those of the Government officials.

There are "arrogant" publishers and editors who refuse to see that their papers are not performing adequate public service and "shrug away protests about errors and misstatement."

And young newsmen, he said, "so often seem determined to do precisely what the national Administration charges us with doing — advancing their own ideas in print or on the TV screen."

He complained that there was too much emphasis on the "scoop" in both the press and on television and not enough clear-cut separation between news and interpretation.

He emphasized, however, that he thought the complaints by Mr. Agnew and others were intimidation and not fair criticism.