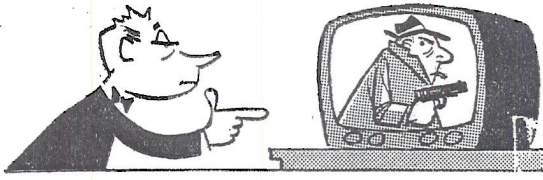


Terrence O'Flaherty



The War for Men's Minds

WHEN HISTORIANS of the future consider the present administration, the extent of Richard Nixon's participation in the Watergate scandal will seem totally insignificant alongside his determination to silence the freedom of expression and the flow of public information in a nation which was founded on such freedoms.



President Nixon

In my estimation, Mr. Nixon's role in the War for Public Television alone will cloud whatever else he has ever done — either good or bad — at home or abroad. Talk of impeachment is foolish. He has impeached himself.

In reconstructing the PTV War, historians must surely cite a battle that turned the tide in favor of freedom of public information. It

was the one fought by the individual station licensees several months ago which resulted in this week's humbling of the Corporation For Public Broadcasting, the group entrusted with passing taxpayers' money to the Public Broadcasting Service to produce programs for the nation's 230 PTV stations.

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LAST YEAR the CPB attempted to push the PBS aside, and usurp its programming functions in direct opposition to the intent of Congress. Thursday morning the two opposing forces announced a joint resolution which included most of the points PBS was fighting for. They resolved:

"To effect a vigorous partnership in behalf of the independence and diversity of PTV and to improve the excellence of its programs;

"To enhance the development, passage by Congress, and approval by the Executive Branch, of a long-range financing program that would remove public broadcasting from the political hazards of annual authorizations and appropriations;

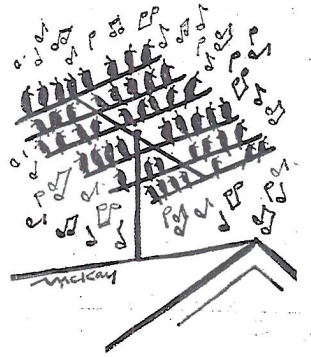
"To further strengthen the autonomy and independence of local public TV stations,

"And to reaffirm that public affairs programs are an essential responsibility of public broadcasting."

THOSE WERE also the aims of most public TV stations and their licensees, as well as the original intent of the legislators who drafted and passed the broadcasting act which created the two branches of PTV.

The Big News is that the Corporation agreed to these aims. What, then, is the reason for this week's miraculous turnabout?

There appear to be several reasons for the change. First, there's Watergate. But also the board members of the Corporation knew they would lose James R. Killian Jr. as their vice chairman if they did not agree to public affairs programming and the other points he considered essential in his Carnegie report on public TV.



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AN ADDITIONAL REASON was the fierce independence of the individual public TV stations and the manner in which they were instantly united against the arrogant intentions of the CPB — a Nixonian board — functioning with the blessings of the newly formed White House Office of Telecommunications Policy.

"A year ago it would have been impossible," said one KQED staffer. "It's a miracle."

Better than that, it may be the first good result from the opening of the Watergate.