

White House Compiles Alleged Press 'Sins'

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 4—In the White House there is a carefully compiled list of alleged journalistic sins that television in particular has committed against President Nixon. They are sins of omission and sins of commission, and partly because of the list there is every indication, people in the White House say, that for the foreseeable future at least the President is going to keep up his attacks on the press.

On the White House list are such allegations as that, over the last few years, Walter Cronkite, the Columbia Broadcasting System news commentator, interviewed only three persons on network television: Daniel Ellsberg, John W. Dean 3d and Archibald Cox—none of whom could be considered admirers of the President.

The White House admits that Mr. Cronkite, on Thursday night, did interview Leon Jaworski, who has been chosen as the special Watergate prosecutor to succeed Mr. Cox. But it was not, they say, a long interview such as the Ellsberg, Dean and Cox interviews.

On Friday, Oct. 26, in the midst of a television news conference, Mr. Nixon made a blistering attack on network news reporting, saying, "I have never seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting in 27 years of public life."

Neither the President that evening nor his press spokesmen later would give specific examples, but the White House list had been put together and this might have been what the President had in mind, according to Ken W. Clawson, who runs the White House Office of Communications.

Observers here believe that the Nixon Administration attacks on the press are part of a carefully planned strategy to gain sympathy for the President during his Watergate problems. When Watergate first arose and there were as many rumors about the scandal as there were facts, such a White House policy was clearly effective. But it is difficult to see what can be gained when so many of the Watergate rumors later are substantiated, the observers say.

'A Therapeutic Value'

Well, first of all, Mr. Clawson said, the attacks apparently have a "therapeutic value on the President, and they are often visceral."

And to support the visceral feeling there is the list of alleged offenses. On Oct. 22, for instance, the first weekday after Mr. Cox was dismissed, the three television networks ran 19 news spots that the White House considered unfavorable to the President, one news spot the White House considered neutral and two

news spots it considered favorable.

"When Senator Fulbright says something against our foreign policy we may not like it, but we have to admit he's important enough to be on television," Mr. Clawson said. "When Moe Udall calls for the President's impeachment that doesn't mean anything. If he and I went to the Capitol to get a cup of coffee, we'd get it if I had money in my pocket—that's how much clout Moe Udall has."

Mr. Udall, known as "Moe," is Representative Morris K. Udall, Democrat of Arizona.

"Senator [Daniel K.] Inouye [Democrat of Hawaii] gets on television news and calls for the President's resignation," Mr. Clawson said. "He's on the Watergate committee, which hasn't heard all the testimony yet, but he asks for the President's resignation. That would be like a juror saying a suspect should be convicted of murder before the trial had ended and all the evidence was in."

These are two examples on the White House list.

George Meany also demanded that the President get out of the White House. "Everyone knows he uses the most inflammatory language," Mr. Clawson said.

And, he added, in the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations Executive Council meeting, held before Mr. Meany's statement, "we know that Paul Hall [head of the Seafarers International Union] pleaded, 'let's not do this. It strikes at the Presidency.'"

The White House strategy is apparently twofold: To gain sympathy for the beleaguered President and to make it appear that the news media, particularly television, are working to create a groundswell of public opinion in favor of the President's resignation or impeachment.

"Were those 19 television news spots reporting, or were they creating an impeachment atmosphere?" is the way Mr. Clawson sums it up. "That day on television was probably the last straw for the President—the outcries for impeachment on television in the wake of the Cox firing."

The White House television sin list includes the allegation that although the three networks carried entire news conferences held by Mr. Cox and Elliot L. Richardson, who had resigned as Attorney General, only C.B.S. carried Secretary of State Kissinger's entire news conference about the Middle East crisis.

Mr. Clawson said that A.B.C. had done a fairly good job on the Kissinger news conference also but contended that "on this matter of war and peace N.B.C. cut off the Secretary 30 minutes in his press conference."

It is White House theory that television, because it is licensed, can be more easily intimidated than the printed news media. But there is also a belief in the White House that the technical realities of television—its ability and need to be on the air with the news quickly—also works unfairly against the President.

Responding to Mr. Clawson's allegations about the news spots, a spokesman for C.B.S. network news said: "What we were doing was reporting the news. We were not trying to create an atmosphere. We're not going and putting impeachment in anybody's mouth," he added. "In all of the news broadcasts generally we have reported both sides. We're trying to give the full story."

Richard C. Wald, president of N.B.C. News, responded: "The main thrust of these questions is that if Mr. Clawson had control of the nation's news from the White House he would have reported differently. In the exercise of our own news judgment we reported this way. And there's no sense in getting into a shouting match with a partisan."

A spokesman for A.B.C. News said: "We do monitor ourselves for fairness and balance and our record for fairness and balance speaks for itself. When we do a roundup on Washington we use both sides of the question."

Those in the White House who do not believe the networks are "out to get" the President believe instead that television reporters are, in the words of one White House employe, "more interested in getting a colorful quote than they are in quoting the right [important] person."

Newsmen who have to work with the White House, however, see the problem differently. They point to a long history of what they view as lies by White House spokesmen and officials. They also contend, that unless the White House wants to get across a particular point of view, it is extremely difficult to gain access to Administration officials in order to do the proper amount of reporting.

Suddenly Accessible

John Herbers of The New York Times said, for instance, that he had been trying to see Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Mr. Nixon's chief of staff, for several weeks with no success. However, after Mr. Cox was dismissed, Mr. Herbers said he had quickly received a telephone call urging him to go to General Haig's office. "The White House wanted to get out as much of its rationalization as it could on the firing of Cox, so suddenly General Haig was very accessible," Mr. Herbers said.

Most reporters agree that despite the problem they have in gaining access to White

House officials, it is somewhat easier in the second Nixon Administration than it was in the first, and that the new White House team of General Haig and Melvin R. Laird is somewhat more understanding of newsmen's problems in covering the President than was the old Haldeman-Ehrlichman team.

Last August, while the President was at his home at San Clemente, Calif., Mr. Clawson not only arranged for reporters to see White House officials who were traveling with the President, such as General Haig, but would also call reporters traveling with the party and try to instigate the interviews himself.

Mr. Clawson, a former Washington Post reporter, believes he was successful in what he termed his effort to open up the Administration a bit.

Reporters who were at San Clemente at the time believe it was successful then, but they contend that access diminished once they got back to Washington.

The most recent Presidential and press confrontation has completed the circle, with Mr. Clawson once again on the phone calling networks and trying to place Administration spokesmen on television.

For instance, last week the President's son-in-law, David Eisenhower, was on television scolding the press, so was Patrick J. Buchanan, a Presidential speechwriter. And Julie Eisenhower, David's wife and the President's younger daughter, publicly defended her father.

Still, in recent weeks there has at least been a White House tendency to reply quickly after the White House press office has been alerted that an article is about to break. Thus, when The New York Times called the White House last week to get comment on an article reporting that President Nixon had personally intervened in the I.T.T. case, the White House responded with its side in time to make The Times's first edition that evening.

Previously, under similar circumstances, the White House often would not comment on an article until it appeared in print—or simply would not return a reporter's telephone call. This gave the White House the advantage of being able to say that the article was one-sided, in that it did not express the official version.

The White House at present is also trying somewhat of a soft sell. Howard K. Smith, an A.B.C. News anchorman, said that Ronald L. Ziegler, President Nixon's press secretary, called him after Mr. Smith on Wednesday editorially urged the President to resign or face impeachment.

"He [Ziegler] explained their viewpoint—in sorrow, not in anger—and I just found no reason to change what I thought," Mr. Smith said of the Ziegler telephone call. He said he did not regard Mr. Ziegler's telephone call as an attempt to put pressure on him.