

Terrence O'Flaherty



Prophet and Loss Statement

HERE'S the guess-who-said-it quotation of the week:

"I think that it's time our great newspapers have at least the same objectivity, the same fullness of coverage that television has. I can only say thank God for television and radio for keeping the newspapers a little more honest."



President Nixon

One clue: It was followed immediately by this:

"I leave you gentlemen now and you will write it, you will interpret it. That's your right. As I leave you I want you to know, just think how much you're going to be missing. You won't have Nixon to kick around any more because, Gentlemen, this is my last press conference."

It wasn't the remark of a good sport and it didn't scan very well even though he had a whole night to phrase

his farewell after losing the governorship of California. It wasn't even an accurate forecast. Yet it is likely to go down in history books as Mr. Nixon's most memorable public statement.

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CBS NEWS ran a film clip of this embarrassing moment on its Sunday program "The Embattled President" which was the first network news special since Mr. Nixon's ill-tempered, unfounded and painfully transparent attack on television newsmen last week. In the decade or more since then a lot has happened to him, but he has retained one quality through it all: his transparency on TV.

Television is a formidable medium to engage — particularly when it is challenged as inexpertly as the President did last week — because television has the tapes to look back upon. Maybe the greatest irony of them all will be the demands made by the White House to subpoena network TV tapes, but once Mr. Nixon went into the tape business himself, he has refused to release his own.

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PRESIDENT NIXON'S recent castigation of the television press places the TV networks in an uncomfortable position. They cannot knuckle under to the White House and yet the President's record is so shabby that the mere recitation of it seems to substantiate the White House claim of unfairness. This appears to me to be the kind of Patrick Buchanan tactic which the President believes will work.

In spite of this amateurishness on Mr. Nixon's part, CBS News gave him a fair shake on Sunday's special. But even fairness looks bad for Mr. Nixon.

Among the many observers who attempted to probe the reasons for the President's bad relations with TV newsmen was Hugh Sidey who suggested that President Nixon entered the arena looking for a fight with the medium. To substantiate it he quoted historian James David Barber: "That's his make-up. He's got to have a fight."

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CBS NEWSMAN Roger Mudd's conclusion: "The Nixon strategy of counterattack is to regard Watergate as a minor problem and not one of the people's problems. The three men we heard tonight (Alexander Haig, Ronald Ziegler and Bryce Harlow) have said the President has been almost entirely preoccupied with inflation, the cost of living and the energy crisis as though the relationship which has traditionally existed between voter and President is NOT a people's problem.

"The idea put forth by the President's men that the crisis is really a Washington fantasy hatched by political enemies and that the people beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains are not really consumed by this is, I believe, untrue. If the White House advisers believe that, they are really unhooked from reality.

"And as for Ziegler's claim that they have a good story to tell about the Watergate tapes, nobody will buy that. The administration has asked the country to believe just once too often."