

Terrence O'Flaherty Views TV

A Sequel to 'The Hindsyte Saga'

"ONE YEAR of Watergate is enough," said Richard Nixon, but he may not be the right person to make such an observation. The nation's public affairs broadcasters would certainly agree with him, however.

Last week in New York — even before the IRS tax assessment with its implication of fraud — many broadcasters were confident that the President will be impeached and were proceeding with plans to televise the Senate trial.



Mike Mansfield

As it now stands, the Senate is off limits for TV but there has been official discussion about lifting the ban. Majority leader Mike Mansfield has already come out for total live coverage. Senator James Buckley, the New York conservative who called for the President's resignation, is against TV, however, on grounds that it might become "a Roman circus."

"Quite the contrary," replied Mansfield. "It would be a very somber proceeding and anyone who clowned or acted up would pay a heavy penalty."

It is my belief that the Senate would welcome total TV coverage for anything so serious. In this period of national disillusionment and distrust, full public exposure to the hearings and trial via television is the only way in which the entire country will

accept the eventual judgment.

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MEANWHILE, the White House has not yet come up with any official instances to substantiate the President's charge against the nation's television newscasters last October: "I have never seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting in my 27 years of public life."

Immediately afterward the National News Council, a professional group formed to investigate such complaints against the news media, made the first of several requests to the White House for specific instances. None was forthcoming.

By coincidence, however, a broadcast journalism group at American University in Washington had been making a recorded survey of the three commercial network newscasts during the two weeks prior to Mr. Nixon's outbreak. Their "inescapable conclusion" after weeks of studying the transcripts gave a clean bill of health to the networks.

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THEY FOUND so much "objectivity," in fact, that the students questioned network newsmen to determine if they had been given special instructions to be careful of bias. They had not.

Publication of their findings drew a reply of sorts from Mr. Nixon's deputy special assistant Bruce Herschenhorn who said his examples of distortion were really his own observations and did not necessarily reflect what the President had in mind. They were embarrassingly superficial including the failure to broadcast a Joseph Alsop theory about accidental erasure and the objection to the label "Saturday Night Massacre" to describe the sudden departures of Cox, Richardson and Ruckelshaus.

If television newsmen had planned it they couldn't have devised a more stunning vindication.