

TV Review

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Wallace Interviews
Haldeman on CBS
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By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

Currently the centerpiece of a "checkbook journalism" debate, "Haldeman: The Nixon Years — Conversations With Mike Wallace" was shown yesterday on CBS at 6 P.M. The second hour will be presented next Sunday at the same hour. H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, the former Nixon aide who is now appealing a conviction for perjury, conspiracy and obstruction of justice, has been reportedly paid "more than \$25,000" each by CBS News for the exclusive interviews. Although the arrangement was announced only a few weeks ago, the program noted that the "contract" was signed last October.

Earlier this year, CBS reportedly paid G. Gordon Liddy, another Watergate conspirator, "in the neighborhood" of \$15,000 for an interview carried by "60 Minutes." The two disclosures triggered widespread apprehension, even at the networks of NBC and ABC, that the practice could establish a pattern of competition in which news interviews would go to the highest bidder. Possibly — as in Britain — all elected and appointed officials might expect payment for print and broadcast interviews.

CBS News stresses that its official policy carefully makes a distinction between hard news and materials "in the nature of electronic memoirs or an electronic article by a well-known columnist or author." It paid Presidents

Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson, after they had left the White House, for series of reminiscences. It paid Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet writer, for a more recent interview.

CBS News concedes that there are gray areas. Richard S. Salant, president of the network division, commenting on the Haldeman contract, has said: "I did indeed find that my call, even at the time I made it, was a close one . . . I cannot preclude the possibility that my decision drew the line between permissible payments and impermissible payments at the wrong place."

Given last night's first hour of the Haldeman interview, "the wrong place" would seem to win on basic points. Mr. Haldeman, expertly projecting a new image, described by Mr. Wallace as "modishly long-haired and amiable," was given a national platform for arguing his case with boyish smiles and appealing sincerity. Watergate was all a matter of bad judgment, a serious failure of judgment. He was never cruel, only tough. He pleaded guilty to foolishness.

He was reminded that Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor appointed by President Richard M. Nixon, had finally concluded that "if the American people had not demanded action in the Watergate scandal, it might have grown into outrages as great as those in Nazi Germany. Mr. Haldeman's reply: "Well, here again, you're into this verbal excess thing."

In other words, despite the typically "tough" performance of Mr. Wallace—tones and looks of skepticism and exasperation—Mr. Haldeman took full advantage of his public-relations opportunity.

The gray area becomes grayer, wrapped in questions about the morality of a society that rewards its con-

victed felons with huge incomes from lectures, books, magazine articles and TV appearances. Meantime, while clucking righteously, NBC and ABC can examine their own closets. NBC has paid John W. Dean 3d and Sirhan B. Sirhan for interviews. ABC's "Am America" paid William F. Calley Jr. while agreeing not to get into details of the My Lai massacre.

Any author who has ever made the nonpaying tour of plugging a book on television knows that the TV payment goes far beyond the presence or absence of direct cash. The selling power of the mass-audience medium is vast. For network news organizations there will be a tension between using and being used as long as the gray area persists. The solution will have to go beyond clever gimmicks, such as last night's opening close-up of Mr. Haldeman busily writing, presumably his "memoirs." The differences between print and broadcasting remain dramatically significant.