

Cancellation of 1972 Election

How That Rumor

Santa Monica

Philip (Flip) Webster, a student at Towson State College in Towson, Md., heard about it from a handbill that was being passed out around the Johns Hopkins University campus in Baltimore.

Randa Lynn Byrne, a junior at Michigan State University in East Lansing, heard about it from Clyde Morris, her communications professor who had heard about it from a friend who had a clipping from a paper in Portland, Ore.

Harvard chemistry professor George Kistiakowski, who was science adviser to President Eisenhower, heard about it from some people who had picked up the rumor in North Carolina.

Peter Burchyns, a graduate student, overheard it in a conversation between two students at Stanford University who had seen it in the Wall Street Journal.

Kathryn Bennett heard it at a neighborhood meeting in Minneapolis from someone who had read it in the Village Voice.

ELECTION

What each one of these people heard, along with thousands, perhaps millions of others across the country, was the rumor that the Nixon Administration had hired the Rand Corporation, a super "think tank" in Santa Monica, to study the possibilities

'Orange' Ruckus

Dungiven.

Northern Ireland

Police and British troops yesterday dispersed a group of rock-throwing Roman Catholics during a march through this predominantly Catholic town by 1500 Protestant "Orangemen."

A police spokesman said about 100 Catholic spectators

were angered by the Protestant march and several snatched bowler hats—symbol of the Protestant orange order—from the marchers.

The spokesman said two policemen were slightly injured, but reported no serious incidents.

United Press

of canceling the American election in 1972.

Rand, which does 80 per cent of its work for the Defense Department, has categorically denied the rumor, but the talk continues to embellish itself and circulate. It got to the point that last weekend, White House counselor Daniel P. Moynihan felt obliged to dwell on it at length in a commencement address. He called the viability of the rumor symptomatic of the fact that mistrust of government had reached "epidemic" proportions.

Rand has received hundreds of letters and phone calls on the matter from all over the country — from congressmen, professors, students and housewives. It has sought to quash the reports in every instance, but, in the words of Jack Vogel, communications direc-

tor, "I don't think we've seen the end of this thing yet.

The first "leak" came from the Washington bureau of the Newhouse News Service, a national wire that feeds Newhouse's 25 papers throughout the country. The four paragraph item, which ran in early April in Newhouse's gossipy weekend feature, News Scope said, in part:

"Washington—The White House is ordering up several hush-hush security studies and one of them is reported to address the question: What would happen if there is no presidential election in 1972?"

"President Nixon's advisers are understood to be increasingly concerned about the country's internal security — and the chances of radical elements disrupting governmental operations, includ-

* Story was carried by Wall Street Journal, 24 Apr, and The Nation, 27 Apr. (See L.A. Free Press, 8 May, this file.)
Article in The Nation copied and filed 27 Apr.)

Got Around

ing national elections.

"The study apparently being undertaken by the Rand Corporation, a defense-oriented California 'Think' factory, will try to envision a situation where rebellious factions using force or bomb threats would make it unsafe to conduct an election and provide the President with a plan of action . . ."

The item ran in at least a half dozen papers (News-scope goes to eight newspapers) from Harrisburg, Pa., to Portland, Ore. It was followed by a longer Newhouse story in mid-April, which repeated the rumor as "unconfirmed" and included a White House denial.

By now, however, the story had been picked up by the Village Voice, an influential New York City weekly newspaper, which ran it on April 16, citing the Newhouse stories as its source.

NATIONAL

Interestingly, most of the national press — Time, Newsweek, the New York Times, and the Washington Post — and television stayed away from the rumor,* at least until Moynihan openly discussed it in his address at Fordham University.

Moreover, many of the outlets which printed the report also carried the denial of Rand president Henry S. Rowen, that the institution "has not undertaken such a

study; it does not contemplate making such a study; nor has it been approached by anyone with a proposal for such a study."

Rowen repeated this in person to a reporter, adding that Rand had searched its files back three years for something that might be construed or misconstrued as the rumored study. "There was nothing," he insisted. "Dissidence, elections or violence in America is not a subject we are working on."

Despite this the rumor queries continue to pour into Rand — most of them from university communities.

William Howard, of the Newhouse Washington bureau, author of the original "News-scope" item, now says, "We have not been able to substantiate this story since we printed it." He added that News-scope is usually reserved for "speculative stuff" and if he had it to do again he would not have printed the item.

Rand president Rowen speculated that the election study rumor thrived because of "a heightened sense of anxiety" in the country and "a widespread feeling that government is not to be trusted." "Why should they believe governmental denials or anybody else's," he asked.

INSTRUMENT

A second factor, in the view of Karl Taeuber, a sociologist at Rand on leave from the University of Wisconsin

is Rand's reputation among New Letters as an instrument of the war machine.

Dr. Clyde Morris, a professor of communications at Michigan State University, who has studied the sociology of rumors, reaffirmed that for a rumor to flourish there has to be "a predisposition to believe it."

Tamotsu Shibutani, a sociology professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, whose book on rumors is considered the definitive work on the subject, said that "the kind of excitement caused by the Cambodian invasion, and the way it was interpreted by many people as a kind of tricky move by one man, the President, would tend to make people believe he was capable of doing other 'tricky' things.

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