

The State of the Press

by Walter Cronkite

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None of these cases [Teapot Dome, etc.] was so potentially far-reaching as the one now being exposed. For the Watergate bugging was an attempt to steal a birthright far more precious than money, the citizen's privilege to choose his president, fair and square. The stealing of votes, fraud at the polls, is not exactly unknown in our country, but this case goes further than that. It was an attempt, on the national level, to subvert the two-party system, which is right at the roots of our system. It was a naked attempt to use power for the perpetuation of power, and down that road dictatorship thrives and democracy cannot survive.

"This Washington atmosphere so repressive to the free press is now further poisoned with the attempt to bring the network news programs to heel by making them responsive to the local stations, where the government has licensing power and thus can bring political and financial pressures to bear. It is strange that the administration cannot see that the power with which it would invest itself today it might have to pass on to another political party tomorrow. Or, perhaps, does it believe that with such power over a cowed and intimidated press that is not a serious possibility? The arrogance of Watergate might lead us to accept that diabolical theory. "