

# Burch Supports Agnew; Shift in F.C.C. Role Seen

## New Agency Head Says Speech Is a Warning to TV to Reform Itself

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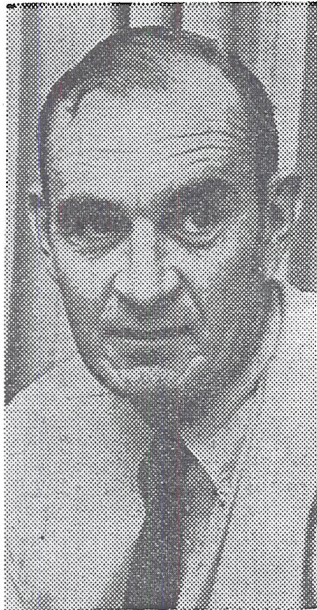
Dean Burch, the new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, said today that Vice President Agnew's speech attacking television news presentation amounted to a "physician, heal thyself" warning to the networks.

Mr. Burch said he saw no suggestion of intimidation either in last night's speech or in his own acknowledged request to the networks for transcripts of their commentaries on President Nixon's Nov. 3 speech on Vietnam.

On Capitol Hill and among older hands at the F.C.C., however, both the Vice President's speech and Mr. Burch's direct approach to the three network presidents were interpreted as significant departures from the traditional relationship between the Federal Government and the news media.

Mr. Burch's endorsement of the Vice President's criticism of the networks also appeared to foreshadow a fundamental and unexpected change in the general posture of the seven-member commission.

Until yesterday, Mr. Burch, who served as the Republican



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Dean Burch

National Chairman during Senator Barry Goldwater's Presidential campaign in 1964, had been warmly regarded by the broadcasting industry as a "pro-business" conservative.

But today Mr. Burch was being reassessed as an aggressive "anti-establishment" force, embracing at least partly the criticisms by his liberal commission colleagues of the networks and local broadcast owners.

Democratic leaders in both branches of Congress defended the networks today against what

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they considered an official effort to intimidate the news media.

Senator Stephen D. Young, Democrat of Ohio, called the Vice President's speech "a blatant attempt to discredit and stifle free and open coverage of the news and analyses of news events."

"Far from being mere criticism," he said, "it was an effort to suppress criticism."

In the House, Representative Andrew Jacobs Jr., Democrat of Indiana, saw in Mr. Agnew's speech "a creeping socialistic scheme against the free-enterprise broadcast industry."

And Representative James G. O'Hara, Democrat of Michigan, warned that the Vice President's speech could open the way to the worst sort of dictated press.

But Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Republican leader in the Senate, agreed heartily with the Vice President. "I think the networks deserve a thorough goosing," he said.

Mr. Burch's formal statement on the Vice President's speech was considered something of a departure in itself. He said he thought Mr. Agnew's comments on news coverage "were thoughtful, provocative and deserve careful consideration by the industry and the public."

"I think it was especially noteworthy," he said "that the Vice President emphasized that he was not calling for Government censorship, but greater public participation in examination of the networks' performance."

Through a commission spokesman, Mr. Burch declared that his request to the networks for transcripts "was basically one for more information."

Mr. Burch said that he had "received complaints about the discussion programs following the President's speech," but he declined to say who had made the complaints.

The chief of the F.C.C. staff division that normally processes complaints against broadcasters said today that he knew of no public reaction against the treatment or discussions of the President's address.

In an afternoon interview, Mr. Burch defended his right to move swiftly, outside the bureaucratic routine, in response to complaints that were made privately.

"I think if it's improper for the chairman of the F.C.C. to ask for transcripts of the comments on the President's speech, rather than to wait 30 days to receive them, then there's some-

thing wrong with our system," he said. "The easiest way to get the information was to go from Point A to Point B in a direct line, which is what I did."

Mr. Burch made no direct reply to the question whether Mr. Agnew's speech or his own request for transcripts constituted "pressure."

### Cites Various Pressures

"I think the networks are subject to pressure from every part of our society," he said. "They're subject to pressure from the, shall I say, the left? And the right and the middle."

"The Vice President, as a citizen, as a public officeholder, has every right to let his views be known on how the networks handle anything," Mr. Burch said. "Had the Vice President suggested that the Government censor these networks, that would have been another thing entirely."

The speech boiled down, he suggested, to a statement that the networks should "examine themselves to see whether they were doing a good job. In other words, 'physician, heal thyself'."

Mr. Burch noted that the F. C. C. though it controls the licenses for local broadcast stations, including the 15 major outlets owned and operated by the networks, had no direct regulatory authority over the networks themselves.

A spokesman for the commission said that Mr. Burch had no plans to make any further investigations of the networks' coverage of President Nixon's speech.

Among close observers of broadcast regulation here, it was widely noted today that the Vice President's attack on the networks—their vast power to define news and mold opinion, and their domination of local television—echoed substantially the criticism of F.C.C.'s most outspoken liberal

Democrats, Nicholas Johnson and Kenneth A. Cox.

While the Vice President appeared to see the personal bias of reporters and commentators as the root issue, Mr. Cox and Mr. Johnson have warned about the implications of interlocking corporate control of national communications by "media barons."

But to the extent that both sides see a fundamental danger in the power of the small number of men over American television, there was fresh prospect of a concerned inquiry into broadcasting control.

Commenting in Chicago on Mr. Agnew's speech, Mr. Johnson said: "It is true that the control of the media is in the hands of all too few men. I personally do not believe the answer to that is in substituting a different small group of men. I think the answer lies in opening up the media to all Americans, all the frustrated people who do not hear their problems and their aspirations expressed. I would prefer to see more commentary on television—balanced, fair with all points of view—rather than less."

The Vice President's remarks and Mr. Burch's comments today also appeared likely to have their impact in Congress, where broadcasters are fighting for further protection of their Government licenses.

Senator John C. Pastore, Democrat of Rhode Island, is the chief sponsor of legislation that would bar competitive applications for the three-year broadcast licenses unless an established broadcaster had first been found to have violated his public trust.

Mr. Johnson has denounced the bill as the final consolidation of the broadcasters' power over public airwaves. Until today, it was generally assumed that Mr. Burch would support the legislation.

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