

# Killian Sees Watergate as Helping Public TV

By McCANDLISH PHILLIPS

The Watergate scandal and its apparent aftermath of diminished antagonism to the press by the Nixon Administration may help assure that public broadcasting in the United States will be "free of political control," according to Dr. James R. Killian Jr., the newly elected chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

He said that pressures had been applied to noncommercial broadcasting by the Administration just as they have been applied to other news media.

"The issues have been dramatized here," Dr. Killian said, referring to the Watergate revelations, "and I think in general the American public is going to demand that there be independence for public broadcasting within the terms of its Congressional mandate."

As examples of the kind of pressures that have been felt, he cited Mr. Nixon's 1972 veto of a bill on financing of public broadcasting and statements by two Presidential aides, Clay T. Whitehead and Patrick J. Buchanan, among other factors.

Dr. Killian made his observations in an interview in his office at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was president from 1948 to 1959.

As chairman of the Carnegie Commission, whose report led to the founding charter of public broadcasting, Dr. Killian has sometimes been called "the father of public television."

## Threat Is Seen

He was elected to his present post on May 9 as a result of the abrupt resignation on April 14 of the former chairman, Thomas B. Curtis, a conservative Republican whom President Nixon had appointed to the board.

Mr. Curtis subsequently said that the White House had "tampered with" the board and threatened its independence.

Earlier, John W. Macy Jr. had resigned as the board's president, saying that the Administration had begun an all-out attack on free video journalism in 1971.

Discussing the question of how much control the Government can get over public broadcasting in the United States, Dr. Killian said:

"To me, the pronouncement out of the White House that seemed to be the most revealing, and the most disturbing, was the statement that Mr. Buchanan made on television. It

was an astonishing statement and one of the striking examples, I think, of hubris on the part of a member of the White House staff."

Mr. Buchanan had made the remarks this year on the Dick Cavett show, lamenting that the Administration's proposed increase in finances for public television, from \$35-million to \$45-million last year, had been greatly increased on Capitol Hill and extended to cover a two-year period.

"I had a hand in drafting the [President's] veto message," Mr. Buchanan had said. He described how the White House compared the bill with what it saw on public television, where it found such presences as:

Sander Vanocur, whom Mr. Buchanan described as "a notorious Kennedy sycophant in my judgment;" Robert MacNeil, "who is anti-Administration"; Elizabeth Drew, who "is definitely not pro-Administration, I would say anti-Administration."

"Washington Week in Review" is unbalanced against us," Mr. Buchanan said. "You have 'Black Journal,' which is unbalanced against us. You have Bill Moyers's, which is unbalanced against the Administration, and then for a figleaf they throw in William F. Buckley's program."

## 'Different Situation'

The Senate voted the big financing bill out by 82 to 1, thinking, Mr. Buchanan said, that Mr. Nixon "couldn't possibly have the courage to veto something like that." He continued:

"And Mr. Nixon, I'm delighted to say, hit that ball about 450 feet down the rightfield foul line, right into the stands; and now you've got a different situation in public television."

Related to the question of how much the Government can or should control public broadcasting are other questions now being raised.

Has the Congress written into law provisions that will help the Government curb free expression on noncommercial television, and has the executive branch attempted to use that law as a lever of control?

The Corporation for Public

Broadcasting was created by an act of Congress in 1967 as a private, independent, non-political body "which will not be an agency of the United States Government."

In electing Dr. Killian as chairman, the corporation has moved a figure of singular prestige into a pivotal position, but the 69-year-old administrator's term as a board member, which began in 1968, expires next March, and he is not certain that he would accept reappointment.

At that time, four other board members' terms will also expire, leaving five vacancies to be filled by President Nixon with Senate confirmation. The law says that not more than eight members of the 15-member board may be from one political party.

There are now two vacancies on the board, so within a year the President will have seven appointments to it.

Four present members of the board who are regarded as the most favorable to the White House still have two or three years to serve.

Elaborating on how "the Watergate history might in a curious way help" free broadcasting from the threat of political control, Dr. Killian said:

"If certain publications had not been persistent in their reporting, these things would not have come to light, and I think that demonstrates the importance of a free press—and I include in that free television reporting, too—and this will be of help in demonstrating how public television itself must be free within its own special set of objectives."

"I think we may have gone through a period where there will be a new affirmation, a new understanding, that this board is going to be free of political control," Dr. Killian said.

He was asked about the distinction recently drawn by his fellow board member, Neal B. Freeman, "between public broadcasting and the free press."

Mr. Freeman, who, as vice president of the King Features

Syndicate is a member of the press, said that the press was protected by the First Amendment, forbidding any law abridging freedom of the press.

The corporation, on the other hand, he pointed out, "was created precisely by an act of Congress, an act by the way which is quite specific and thus abridges freedom of the press in many particulars."

"It is a bit late in the game for those of us in public broadcasting to pretend that we are part of the free press," he said.

Dr. Killian said Mr. Freeman had meant that there was "a special responsibility" placed upon public broadcasting to achieve "objectivity and balance."

"There is no special act for other broadcasting, no special act for newspapers," he said. "In that sense it could be said that this is one limitation on public broadcasting."

"But I don't think that this is impinging on freedom of programming. Since the act sets up certain mandates for public television, the freedom of the press becomes a different proposition from the freedom of public broadcasting."

"Yet Congress sought to give public television the attributes of freedom of the press—I think that is clear in the bill. It speaks of the board affording 'maximum protection to public broadcasting from extraneous interference and control.'"

Dr. Killian does not minimize the perplexities of regulated freedom.

"This subtle and almost metaphysical question of what constitutes objectivity and balance is terribly difficult to handle," he remarked, pointing out that he wanted to see that it "doesn't result in timidity in programming."

As to new members of the board, Dr. Killian drew a comparison between the board and the Supreme Court, with "the President making the appointments and Congress probing and asking questions before it confirms."

"I suspect Congress is going to do that to the hilt on appointments to this board, and I think it should," he said.