

Terrence O'Flaherty



Sitting Bull

TELEVISION reacted in a curious, sardonic and occasionally humorous manner to Spiro Agnew's Last Stand on the Little Big Horn of public opinion provided free of charge by the nation's television stations Monday evening.

All three commercial nets carried it live followed by comment at the big audience time of 7:30 p.m. in the East and the low audience time of 4:30 p.m. here. But when Westerners caught excerpts of it later on the evening news, all three nets gave it the kiss-off which it so richly deserved.



Spiro Agnew

John Chancellor ignored it completely until the last half of his Evening News when he ran excerpts without comment.

ABC's Reasoner-Smith news interrupted Agnew in mid-sentence with an alarmingly apt Bufferin commercial which began: "To be a mother, is to suffer . . ."

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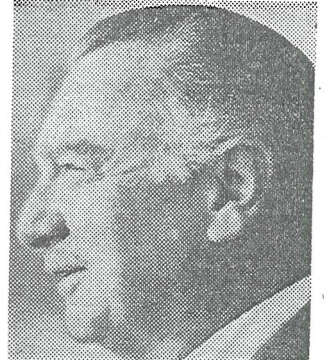
CBS'S EVENING NEWS ran brief excerpts without comment, but Walter Cronkite doubled the public frustration with this sadly sardonic observation at the very close of his newscast:

"President Nixon is having a White House dinner tonight in honor of former Secretary of State William Rogers. The list of invited guests includes former Nixon campaign fund raiser Maurice Stans who is under federal indictment in New York in the Vesco Case. That's the way it is, Monday, Oct. 15, 1973. This is Walter Cronkite. Good night."

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THE MOST outspoken comment came from Public Television's NPACT guests. George Will, the Washington editor of National Review was appalled:

"The claim that he has been railroaded out of office and cannot get a fair trial by the Department of Justice, which is subservient to the President, is a terrible message, but one for which there is, I'm afraid, an audience. That's what frightens me" . . . William Greenhalgh, associate dean of Georgetown University Law Center picked Agnew's speech apart word by word: "What he calls 'insinuations' that he pocketed the money were actually explicit 'allegations' by men naming names, dates, times, places and sums released in a 40-page Justice Department document."



Walter Cronkite

The best reporting of the Washington scene during this year of scandal has been by ABC's Sam Donaldson, in my estimation. He did not fail viewers in his resume of the Agnew speech: "The Vice President went out fighting. But if he really wanted to clear his name, when he should have fought—in court—he made a deal rather than fight."

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A QUESTION was raised by me in Monday's column: Why is a government official who has resigned rather than face prosecution on Justice Department charges of bribery and extortion given free time on three networks? It was answered in part by a United Press story in yesterday's Chronicle which reported that NBC considered Agnew "newsworthy" whether he was in office or out; CBS agreed and ABC contrived this curious excuse: "We didn't give him free time, we covered a news event. NBC gave Agnew free time and we covered their coverage."

The story failed to observe however that it was the individual stations which provided the "free time" — not the networks. The loss of revenue was borne by the individual stations because Agnew's stand was made in "station time" not "network time" clear across the country. It could have been his final act of revenge against the medium he hated and which, you will notice, he failed to thank for its generosity in providing him a platform for his curious farewell.