

White House Criticizes Media

By William Greider

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"What the President is asking for is very clear," the White House press spokesman explained, "and that is perspective."

In the interest of perspective the White House yesterday offered a tart critique of Washington journalism, especially the three television networks, adding flesh to President Nixon's complaints about "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting."

The TV networks should sort out the flood of charges against Mr. Nixon more cautiously, the White House suggested. TV news editors should balance film footage

more evenly between friends and foes of the President. The commentators should tone down their commentaries.

Even Walter Cronkite, the senior voice of CBS News, was the subject of White House criticism, though the President's deputy press secretary declined to attack Cronkite by name.

And a presidential speech writer, Patrick Buchanan, suggested in a TV news interview that the three national networks have a dangerous domination over public opinion.

"It's injurious to the democratic process, in my judgment, and . . . every legal and constitutional means

ought to be considered in order to break up that dominance . . ." Buchanan asserted.

"Do we have an orchestrated counter-attack?" another White House aide asked aloud, the very question that occurred to many journalists. "The answer is no. I wish to hell we did."

Cronkite, it developed, was the TV commentator whom President Nixon had in mind at Friday evening's press conference when he complained that one network aired an accusatory story about his personal finances — even when it knew the story wasn't true.

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As deputy press secretary Gerald Warren elaborated on the incident yesterday, it was plain that he was talking about Cronkite, though the commentator's name and network were never mentioned.

The broadcast in question was an interview last Wednesday evening when Cronkite talked to Archibald Cox, the Watergate Special Prosecutor fired by Mr. Nixon. Among other things, the CBS commentator asked Cox about a previous report that his investigators were looking into a "secret private investment portfolio," supposedly administered on the President's behalf by his friend, C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo. Cox gave an ambiguous reply.

Warren complained that CBS reporters had already inquired at the White House about the story and been told "quite forcefully that there was no truth to the report." At the very least, said Warren, the commentator should have noted with his question that the White House denied the whole story.

For some reason, the President's spokesman did not make a point of attacking the network that originated the story, ABC, which broadcast the initial story on Monday night—an account that vividly characterized the supposed secret portfolio as "the Nixon Checkers Fund of 1973."

In yesterday's counter-attack, none of the presidential aides pretended that the

issue of fair news coverage or the potential benefit of attacking the media would solve the President's problems, but they treated it as an important front in the war against Watergate critics.

"This is an ongoing, continuing, serious problem, with advances and reverses," said Buchanan. "On balance, Friday night was definitely an advance."

The assortment of phone calls and telegrams in reaction to the President's criticism of news media seemed consistent with Buchanan's estimate. All three networks reported receiving several hundred calls at their New York headquarters after Mr. Nixon lambasted them—all weighted against the video.

At ABC, all 272 phone calls were complaints against TV commentators. At NBC, the 600 calls included about 250 critical of NBC plus another 75 which supported the President in general. About 150 asked for impeachment, another 90 supported the network. CBS got mixed reviews from callers—a majority criticized both the TV network and the President.

At the White House pressroom, a small sampling of reaction was pinned to the bulletin board yesterday.

George C. Lynde of Muscogee, Okla., wired the newsmen to complain that their "vile vituperation of the high office of the presidency and of the President himself was enough to make any patriotic American sick."