

More White House 'Secret' DocumentsCampaign to Mute the TV Networks

Washington

The White House undertook a broad campaign in 1970 to pressure the television networks into tempering criticism of President Nixon and refusing free air time to his Democratic opponents, according to White House documents obtained by the Senate Watergate committee.

The documents outlined a series of efforts intended, in the words of one such memorandum, to "tear down the institution" of broadcast journalism. Another memorandum discussed methods to create "an inhibiting impact on the networks and their professed concern with achieving balance" in news coverage.

The plans were detailed in seven "secret" memorandums, written over 22 months beginning in February, 1970, that were made available to the New York Times by Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (rep-Conn.), a member of the Watergate committee.

Weicker said that he did not know whether any of the proposals had been carried out. Taken as a whole, however, they appeared to reflect the administration's attitude toward television news in particular and the news media in general.

SUGGESTIONS

Among the suggestions in the documents were the following:

- A request by H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, for plans to "concentrate on" the National Broadcasting Co. for what Haldeman described as the network's "totally negative approach to everything the administration does."

- An effort to generate public attacks on Chet Huntley, just before his retirement as the New York anchor man on the NBC nightly news programs, because of uncomplimentary re-

marks attributed to him in a Life magazine article. The issue was not Huntley, wrote Lawrence M. Higby in a memo to his superior, Haldeman, but "what we are trying to do here is to tear down the institution."

- A description of efforts by Charles W. Colson, the former White House special counsel, to pressure senior executives of the three commercial networks to resist requests by Democratic spokesmen in Congress and elsewhere for free air time to reply to televised statements by the President.

The Colson memorandum to Haldeman, dated Sept. 25, 1970, said that the network officials were "very much afraid of us and are trying hard to prove they are 'good guys.'"

"These meetings had a very salutary effect," Colson continued, "in letting them know that we are determined to protect the President's position, that we know precisely what is going on from the standpoint of both law and policy, and that we are not going to permit them to get away with anything that interferes with the President's ability to communicate."

MAJORITY

Colson said that he would ask Dean Burch, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, to consider issuing "an interpretive ruling" on the fairness doctrine "as soon as we have a majority" of Republican members on the independent commission. Under the fairness doctrine, broadcasters are required to

air conflicting views on controversial issues.

Referring to officials of NBC and the Columbia Broadcasting System, Colson wrote, "the harder I pressed them, the more accommodating, cordial and almost apologetic they became."

William S. Paley, chairman of CBS, issued a statement last night in New York saying that the

Nixon administration, like prior Democratic and Republican administrations, had made occasional "representations" criticizing coverage by CBS News. But, Paley said, the overtures never affected the network's news coverage and that "our news judgments will never yield to outside influences."

CRONKITE

Walter Cronkite, the managing editor and anchor man of the "CBS Evening News," added on the program last night that "none of that pressure ever reached this desk."

The issue of Democratic access to free television time was first raised in May, 1970, when the FCC announced that it would consider issuing a rule on the obligations of broadcasters under the fairness doctrine. Lawyers for the Democratic national committee sought a ruling that the opposition party would have an automatic right to respond to televised statements by the party in power.

In June, 1972, the commission denied the Democratic party request.

Andrew Schwartzman, a public interest lawyer with the United Church of Christ, said last night that Burch had demonstrated impartiality throughout the fairness doctrine proceedings and "has not allowed the FCC to be used" for partisan purposes.

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