

White House plot against networks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Disclosed confidential memos show that top White House aides plotted a campaign against the TV networks in 1970 in retaliation for programs they felt were slanted against President Nixon.

One such memo from then special presidential counsel Charles W. Colson to former staff chief H. R. Haldeman described the network chiefs as "damned nervous and scared" over pressure exerted by the White House.

CBS Chairman William S. Paley denied yesterday that anything done by the Nixon or previous administrations had affected CBS news reporting. News judgments, Paley said, "will never yield to outside influences."

And CBS news correspondent Walter Cronkite made this comment last night on the Colson-Haldeman memo: "This reporter, managing editor of the CBS evening news, can add that none of the pressure ever reached this desk."

The memos, made public by Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., (R-Conn.) of the Senate Watergate committee, re-

veal a concerted effort by White House aides to intimidate the three networks.

This included use of the Federal Communications Commission, speeches by former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and high-level complaints.

In an "eyes only" memo to former White House Communications Director Herb Klein, Colson noted that "the networks are terribly nervous" over several recent FCC decisions.

And, in a memo to Haldeman, Colson said he would "pursue with FCC Chairman Dean Burch the possibility of an interpretive ruling by the FCC on the role of the President when he uses TV, as soon as we have a majority on the presidentially appointed commission."

In still another memo, Colson referred to the networks as "the other side" and told Haldeman, "I think it is time for us to generate a PR (public relations) campaign against the Democrats and CBS."

More than three years before President Nixon publicly accused the networks of "outrageous, vicious, dis-

torted" reporting, Haldeman asked then presidential aide Jeb Stuart Magruder for suggestions on "the mobilization of the Silent Majority . . . to get them working to pound magazines and the networks."

The disclosure of the memos followed Weicker's release on Wednesday of a 1969 Magruder memo to Haldeman proposing use of the FCC, the antitrust division of the Justice Department and the Internal Revenue Service to force the media into line with administration views on news coverage.

The memos also disclosed:

- A July 1970 proposal by Haldeman aide Larry Higby that an attack be launched against then NBC correspondent Chet Huntley, who had been quoted in Life magazine as criticizing the President.

- A February 1970 suggestion by Haldeman to Magruder that pressure be concentrated "on the few places that count . . . NBC, Newsweek, Life, The New York Times and The Washington Post . . . Don't waste your fire on other things."