

...Buchanan's Outrage

No matter how unfair or regrettable the leaks may be, the stance of outraged indignation comes with poor grace from Patrick J. Buchanan, the President's speechwriter. Mr. Buchanan challenged Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. and the news media to find the sources of the leaks and called the committee sources "nameless, faceless character assassins."

Mr. Buchanan is hardly positioned to cast any stones. A memorandum which he wrote to John Ehrlichman in July 1971 amply documents his views on character assassination. Although he declined the task of discrediting Daniel Ellsberg, he did so not because it would be wrong; he opposed it only because he thought it would bring insufficient political return to the President.

While rejecting the attack on Dr. Ellsberg, Mr. Buchanan suggested White House-inspired campaigns to discredit the Brookings Institution, Parade Magazine and its editor, Lloyd Shearer, and others. All had been less perceptive about the correctness of the positions of the Nixon Administration than Mr. Buchanan would have wished. His tentative response was to consider tarring them all in order, as he said in the Brookings case, to taint "every single anti-Nixon paper that came out of there, subsequent."

Those proposals have a lot less in common with the ideas of the Founding Fathers on the nature of free discussion in our country than they do with the propaganda techniques usually associated with totalitarian regimes. Nowhere in Mr. Buchanan's 1971 document is there any evidence of the moral outrage of his recent statements. His only doubts sprang from a balancing of the political advantages and disadvantages of a calculated White House campaign designed to ruin reputations. On this record, one is hard-pressed to determine whether Mr. Buchanan's cynicism outstrips his callousness to American values, or vice versa.