

Networks Reviewing Policies on Paying for Exclusive

By LES BROWN

Policies governing the payment of news figures for exclusive interviews are coming under review at the three television networks in the midst of the controversy over the television networks in the midst of the controversy over the televised interview with H. R. Haldeman, former White House chief of staff, whose conviction in the Watergate episode is under appeal.

While the networks all profess to be adamantly against paying for hard-news interviews, and while the practice commonly known as "check-book journalism" has had a limited history, there have been a number of recent instances of it.

In addition to Mr. Haldeman, such persons in the news as Sirhan B. Sirhan, William F. Calley Jr., John W. Dean 3d, G. Gordon Liddy and Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn have received money for network news appearances, some directly and others indirectly.

Dean Option Bought

Mr. Dean, for example, gave a first interview to NBC News after that network bought an option for the TV rights to his forthcoming book. He did not ask for or receive money for the interview itself, however.

Mr. Calley appeared on ABC-TV's "A.M. America" through an arrangement with the program department rather than with ABC News. His interview was a promotion for a network special, Stanley Kramer's dramatization, "The Trial of Lieut. William Calley," for which Mr. Calley had been hired as a consultant.

The number of cases of paid access to newsmakers in a relatively brief time has caused concern among network offi-

cials, who fear that the activity could lead to a checkbook competition, with dangerous implications for the quality of journalism.

Their concern is heightened by the fact that several of the persons paid have been convicted of crimes, and payment appears to be resented by much of the public as, in effect, a reward for wrongdoing.

The mail received at CBS indicates that the payment to Mr. Haldeman—reportedly \$50,000 for the two programs—angered many viewers. But the two competing networks are displeased with CBS News for what they consider a breach of ethics. They accuse CBS of stretching its policy permitting news figures to be paid only for memoirs, book rights and the equivalent of magazine articles.

"The Haldeman presentation was not a memoir, and CBS was flat-out wrong on this," said William Sheehan, president of ABC News. He called the two-part interview "an outright buy of a news exclusive."

Reuven Frank, executive producer of "Weekend" for NBC News and former president of the news division, remarked that "paying is the second issue—the first is whether a man like that should be given a platform, knowing that in all probability he will try to manipulate the medium."

He added: "You will notice that most men in public life nearly always fail to answer a question. They all learn how to skirt it. If you let them run, they will use you to say what they want. If like Mike Wallace you try to get them back on the track, you seem rude and win sympathy for the interviewee."

The interviews with Mr. Haldeman were broadcast last Sunday and the Sunday before.

Arrangements were made last October, after NBC News had declined to participate in bidding for the interviews.

According to Richard C. Wald, president of NBC News, the lawyer representing Mr. Haldeman asked for an opening bid of \$150,000, hoping to raise it to \$200,000 or more.

The lawyer, Ronald S. Konucky, said he was bound by an obligation to his client not to discuss the negotiations or the sums involved.

"We were approached before Haldeman's trial. It seemed delicate, so we never discussed price and decided we weren't interested," Mr. Wald said.

Arthur R. Taylor, president of CBS Inc., defended the telecasts as a journalistic decision.

Mr. Taylor noted that the degree of comment the programs generated "has caused a lot of internal discussion, and we will be taking a very hard look at the application of our policy in the future."

CBS entered into its agreement with Mr. Haldeman "in the spirit of presenting an electronic memoir of the person closest to the seat of power in the Nixon Administration," said Bill Leonard, senior vice president of CBS News, who was in

charge of the broadcast.

"We did it," he went on, "because we tried to make a contribution to history. Time will prove that out. It is not a matter of a person being a hero or a villain; a memoir has importance whether or not there is news fallout."

Mr. Leonard added that CBS was not criticized in the past when it paid for long interviews "with news figures that people like." Those included interviews with Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Johnson and Mr. Solzhenitsyn.

Mr. Wallace, who was not involved with the arrangements or negotiations, said he considered the presentations with Mr. Haldeman "justified" on strict journalistic grounds.

"He had nothing to sell and, since the trial was over, would not be persuading a judge or a jury with these broadcasts," Mr. Wallace said. "More important is that he was the second most powerful man in the Nixon Administration, and he was willing to break the silence he had maintained in the White House and afterwards."

Mr. Wallace noted that there was no way to tell ahead of the broadcast how much information or character revelation

Interviews

would be drawn from Mr. Haldeman in close to six actual hours of interview.

"Unfortunately," he said, "we got no more than he chose to give. If he had been more forthcoming in a behind-the-scenes view of the Nixon White House, the programs might have been more interesting and useful."