

“They’re After Dan Schorr”

Date: September 18, 1971

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: H. R. “Bob” Haldeman

Start Time: 10:05

Place Name: Oval Office

In the Senate Watergate hearings in 1973, former White House counsel John W. Dean III testified about the administration’s use of the powers of the federal government against its chosen enemies. During a live on-air broadcast, Daniel L. Schorr of CBS News received a copy of the enemies list and nearly collapsed when he read his own name aloud. In this conversation two years earlier, President Nixon and White House Chief of Staff H. R. “Bob” Haldeman discussed their attempts at “going after” Schorr.

H. R. “Bob” Haldeman: —a very positive, sort of background piece on the press conference.

President Nixon: Rather than just reporting it.

Haldeman: Yeah. [*speaking over President Nixon*] Well, he had done a reporting piece, too, but this is a separate—

President Nixon: Was that in the News Summary?

Haldeman: Uh . . . Yeah, I’m sure it was. I’m sure that’s why it [*unclear*].

President Nixon: Yeah. I don’t want to read it. I just—

Haldeman: It’s probably not today. It may have been yesterday.

President Nixon: [*Unclear.*] [*Tape whip.*] On the other hand, you come down with, [*unclear*] can’t agree with, but you come down to stuff that is . . . these fellows . . . [*tape whip*] infect the media. You take a fellow like this [Daniel L.] Dan Schorr, he’s—I notice—he is always creating something, isn’t he?

Haldeman: Oh . . . He, incidentally, is on—you don't—shouldn't get involved in this, but he's on our tax list, too.

President Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: They're—

President Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: They're going after a couple media people. They're after Dan Schorr and Mary McGrory.

President Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: And—

President Nixon: Like what? Have they been making any money on the outside?

Haldeman: They think they might have some . . . yeah, on them. [*Tape whip.*] [*Unclear*] just want to harass them. Just give them a little trouble.

President Nixon: Exactly. Pound these people.

Haldeman: Just give them something to worry about.

President Nixon: It's routine.

Haldeman: [*Unclear.*] [*Slight chuckle.*] Oh, that's right, you were going to maybe talk to [J. Edgar] Hoover today, too. The damn FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], you know, we, through the indirect route, tried to get an FBI thing on Schorr, and they didn't have anything in their files on him.

And so instead of admitting they didn't have anything, they started doing some investigating. [*President Nixon laughs.*] And that . . . So who did they investigate? They investigated—they talked to people at CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System]. And so, the first person they contacted—

President Nixon: Was Schorr.

Haldeman: —said, “Why are you”—no, not Schorr but some—one of his associates or somebody, you know, in there—said, “Why are you investigating?” They said, “For— [*President Nixon acknowledges*] because he's under consideration for a high-level government position.” Well, that got back to somebody else, and we get this panic-stricken thing from—

President Nixon: [Patrick J. “Pat”] Buchanan.

Haldeman: —from Buchanan, saying, “Jesus Christ! What are you hiring Daniel Schorr for?” [*Laughs heartily.*] He was in a state of absolute panic, thinking we had lost our senses, we’re going to hire Schorr.

President Nixon: That’s all right, though.

Haldeman: [*Continues laughing.*]

President Nixon: If any of that all comes up, you can just say, “Well, it’s on a bipartisan board, so we have to have a Democrat in it.” [*Both laugh.*] [*Unclear.*] Yeah, Schorr will know, you know.

Haldeman: On some of that stuff, I must say, though, the Bureau [FBI] doesn’t have a hell of a lot of finesse.

President Nixon: They’re not much better. [*Unclear*] very much better [*unclear*]. [*Tape whip.*] It was a great PR [public relations] call, though.

Haldeman: Yes, indeed.

End of excerpt.

“Richard M. Nixon and H. R. ‘Bob’ Haldeman on 18 September 1971,” Conversation 576-005, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.