

Film That Changed History?

'State of Union' Swayed Truman On Campaign, Advance Man Claims

By CHARLES ALLDREDGE

(Charles Alldredge resigned as assistant to the Secretary of the Interior in September to take charge of press relations and speeches for the Barkley campaign. With Interior Under-Secretary Oscar Chapman he served as advance man for President Truman's western trip last May and June.)

Washington.

The most important film of 1948—if importance lies in the influencing of people and events—was Frank Capra's "State of the Union." There is good reason to believe the film about a Presidential candidate directly influenced the type of campaign waged by a gentleman named Harry S. Truman.

President Truman first saw "State of the Union" at the premiere April 7. The President at that time was under heavy attack, not only by Republicans but by leaders in his own party who either believed that the Democrats could not win under Truman or who were angered with the President's firm espousal of civil rights.

In the opinion of his advisers, Truman had not firmly made up his mind (a), whether the people would support him regardless of the lukewarmness of party leaders, and (b) if he decided he would have the people's support, what kind of campaign to wage.

President Truman, according to those who watched closely — as Presidential reactions always get watched—has a habit, much like a small boy watching a chase sequence, of lifting himself slightly from his seat when what he sees on the screen excites and interests him. That's how he reacted to the story of a good man Presidential candidate, who almost lost himself, and finally won out over himself and the bosses by appealing frankly to the people.

Early next morning the White House called Metro and asked for immediate delivery of a print to be taken on a cruise on the Presidential yacht. The President, according to the report, wanted some of his friends to see the film. Later, the White House asked for a print again, a rare and perhaps unique occurrence.

Went to the People

It was in April that the President, on a tour of the west to test the people's attitude, and possible campaign methods, began his frank appeals, and his frank denunciations of the 80th Congress. On that tour were the first of the whistlestops. The tour grew in success and reached its climax with the huge friendly crowd of a million people or more at Los Angeles.

On his way back the President's doubts, if he had had any, had vanished. At a dinner in the Capital shortly after he returned, he declared, "There will be a Democrat in the White House in 1949, and you're looking at him!" A good portion of his audience, and they were Democrats, didn't believe him. But he never wavered.

"State" may not have given the President any new ideas. But this writer believes the film confirmed his courage, determination not to quit, firm belief that if you were on the right side and told the people the truth, you probably wouldn't lose. And that even if you lost, you would have lost the right way.

Only the President of the United States could prove this story, which at best is but a footnote to history. But the people who had a hand in "State" will be glad to read it.