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Cronkite Hits Broadcast Curbs

United Press International

Walter Cronkite, sitting before the television cameras as newsmaker rather than newscaster, asked Congress yesterday for a total end of government control over or licensing of broadcasting.

"Broadcast news today is not free," he told the Senate Constitutional Rights Subcommittee inquiry into the state of press freedom today.

"Because it is operated by an industry that is beholden to the government for its right to exist, its freedom has been curtailed by fiat, by assumption and by intimidation and harassment. . . .

"The power to make us conform is too great to forever lie dormant," he said. "The axe lies there temptingly for the use of any enraged administration — Republican, Democrat, Wallace or McCarthyite. We are at the mercy or whim of politicians and bureaucrats and whether they choose to chop us down or not, the mere existence of their power is an intimidating and constraining threat in being."

But after Cronkite and most of the standing-room-only crowd had left, a law professor took the stand to argue for greater restraints.

Prof. Jerome A. Barron of George Washington University said courts should be given power to order publishers and broadcasters to carry paid advertisements advocating the views of those who cannot get news exposure.

Freedom of speech and the press, he said, is not the sole possession of those wealthy enough to own a station or a newspaper. It is a freedom to listen and read as well as to broadcast and print, he said.

"Censorship is no less censorship if it is in private hands," he said, and by

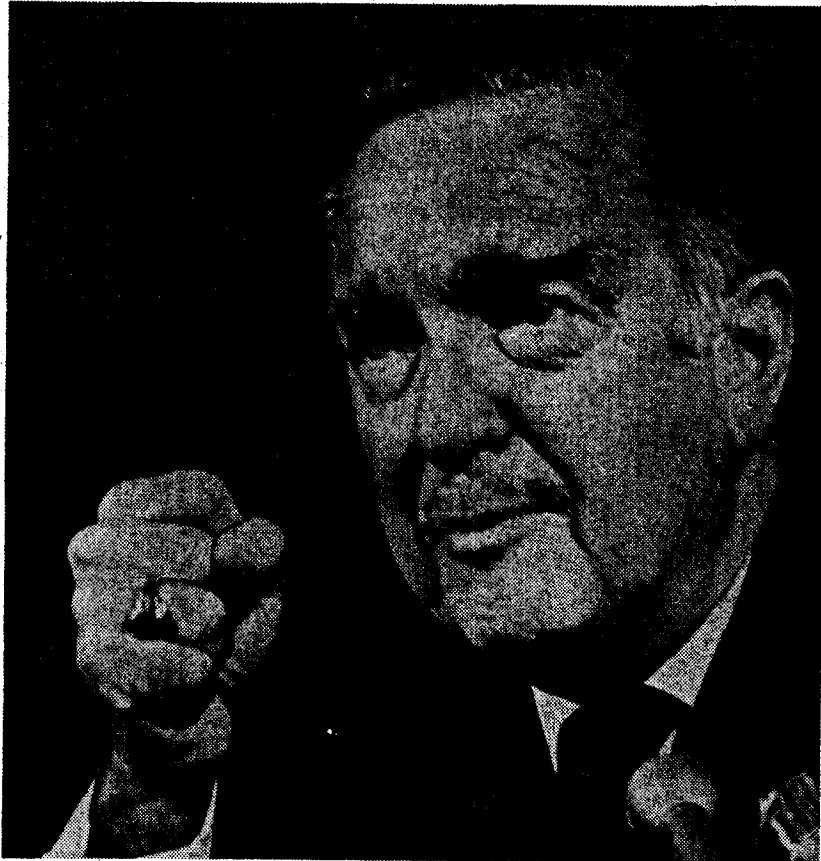
abolishing the Federal Communications Commission's power to license stations "you then have complete censorship."

He said unorthodox ideas—as well as advertisements for or against the Vietnam War—have been unfairly rejected by newspapers.

But Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.C.) subcommittee chairman, argued that "forcing people to broadcast or print things they don't believe in" would violate the First Amendment and "in a sense is confiscation of their property."

Cronkite said licensing was originally necessary because

there were fewer channels or stations than would be broadcasters. But, he said, the development of cable television, FM radio and UHF television has created more outlets than the market can support, so competition between newscasters will serve alone to make news coverage fair.



Associated Press

Walter Cronkite tells Senate subcommittee that "broadcast news today is not free."