

Publisher Field Urges Tougher Libel Laws

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CHICAGO, June 20—Publisher Marshall Field told communications and advertising executives today libel laws should be toughened so reporters may be personally sued for their mistakes even if they are made without malice.

Field said many of the libel suits against journalism can be traced to stories that are personally involved in the lives of the news consumers. He said the report that he made a speech that provoked a strong response from the Chicago Newspaper Guild, whose president said Field's speech was unjustified attack against the men and women who produce his newspaper and "a dark day in the history of Chicago journalism."

Field, 55, publisher of the Chicago Daily News and The Chicago Sun-Times, told his audience that "today we are constantly hearing, 'Never believe what you read in the paper, or All news broadcasts are biased. The sad fact is there is a certain amount of truth to some of these charges. Personally this disturbs and concerns me."

"To encourage more responsible reporting," he said, "I think an individual who feels unfairly treated by a story in a newspaper or on the radio should be able to sue both the media that printed or broadcast the story, but also the individual who wrote or reported the story," he added, "even if there is no malice."

Field later told a reporter the view was his personal one and not company policy.

Lawyers who handle press litigation said libel law already allows anyone damaged by a maliciously false story to sue the reporter, but publishers have traditionally paid any such penalties.