

May Have Stepped on Toes, Says Host

CHATTAHOOGA (AP) — Harry Thornton, Chattanooga television personality who was sent to jail Tuesday for refusing to reveal a news source, says he may have stepped on the toes of "some little tin gods" who contributed to legal action against him.

Thornton was found in contempt of court by Criminal Court Judge Tillman Grant for refusing to divulge the name of a telephone caller

whose remarks were aired on Thornton's show Nov. 22.

THE CALLER, who identified himself only as a member of the Hamilton County Grand Jury, referred to an investigation of former City Court Judge Bennie Harris and said in response to a question from Thornton that it was a whitewash.

Grant ordered Thornton to his court Tuesday to show why he should not be held

in contempt for refusing to give the caller's name last week to either the grand jury or Judge Grant.

Thornton's attorney, Jerry Summers, sought to call witnesses Tuesday whose testimony he said would show the summons that brought Thornton before the grand jury was not requested by that panel.

ORDERED Thornton to jail until he decided to reveal the caller's name, but Thornton was released about three hours later on an order from Judge Charles Galbreath of the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals in Nashville.

Thornton, who claimed protection as a newsmen under the First Amendment, sought to show that the action against him was instigated by Dist. Atty. Ed Davis, who acted as prosecutor at the Tuesday hearing.

Davis has denied he had anything to do with Thornton being called before the grand jury and, later, before Judge Grant.

"MY ATTORNEY and I both feel that we know where it is coming from," Thornton said in a taped interview yesterday with Rick Upshaw, news director of radio station

WGOW in Chattanooga. "And I think most of the people have a pretty good idea."

"We do have some little tin gods in this county and this city who resent any criticism," Thornton said.

"They feel that they are apparently above that, and when you step on their toes a little bit, they find ways to strike back."

"You can call them fat cats, or little tin gods, or whatever you want to call them; the term fits," Thornton said.

DO YOU FEEL that this is why you are in the shape you are in now?" Thornton was asked.

"I think that this was a contributory factor," Thornton replied. "The grand jury is a fine bunch of people. They treated me with courtesy and all respect. I have no complaint against them. They are doing what they consider to be their duty. But I still feel there are extenuating circumstances that I wish we could have had an opportunity to have brought out in court yesterday (Tuesday), because we were prepared to do so."

Grant denied Summers' permission to call five witnesses, including M. C. Gross, grand jury chairman, and Criminal Court Clerk Clyde M. Saunders.

SANDERS HAD said before Thornton's hearing that he issued the subpoena for Thornton's grand jury appearance on instructions from Judge Grant.

Grant, asked if he ordered the subpoena at the request of the grand jury, the district attorney or on his own, refused to comment.

Thornton said he would fight Grant' contempt ruling "to the very top rung."

"IF IT MEANS the Supreme Court in the end, then that's where we will try to go," he said.

Thornton is cohost of the Morning Show on WDEF-TV (Channel 12), a daily talk show often noted for discussion of controversial issues.

William M. Dunaway, general manager of WDEF-TV, said the station supports Thornton's right to protect the identity of a news source.

"I DEFEND the right of Mr. Harry Thornton — and all broadcasters — to report the facts as they see them," Dunaway said. "We further support Mr. Thornton's right to stand by his convictions, as a professional broadcaster, in refusing to surrender the name of his news source to the grand jury."