

U.S. Hit by News Suppression Wave

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

It is the American tradition that the press may publish what it knows and may seek to learn what it can. Never in our history has the press been a better watchdog.

Justice Potter Stewart, a solid conservative who was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Eisenhower, acknowledged recently: "The American press in the past 10 years, and particularly in the past two years, has performed precisely the function it was intended to perform by those who wrote the First Amendment."

Yet ever so quietly, the officials who are uncomfortable under press scrutiny are cracking down on the press. An epidemic of news suppression has hit the country.

Attempts to muzzle the press have become worse since Watergate was supposed to have stopped the practice. We have called this phenomenon "Nixonism," after Richard M. Nixon who tried so hard to intimidate, malign and discredit the press.

In the wake of Watergate, here's what is happening to reporters who dare to dig beyond the official press releases:

- Six reporters in four states are appealing jail sentences imposed on them for refusing to reveal the confidential sources of their stories. In the past four months, 50 other reporters

around the country have been subpoenaed. If they betray their sources, of course, the unauthorized sources will dry up, and the people will be able to get only the official version of the news.

- In typical American cities like Indianapolis, Birmingham, Laconia, N.H., and Port Chester, N.Y., reporters who exposed official wrongdoing have been subjected to frameups and false arrests. In Tucson, Baltimore and Washington, harassment has taken the form of intimidation and surveillance.

- In 13 states, judges have blacked out selected court trials and proceedings by banning news coverage of them.

- Court-authorized book burning has appeared again in this land of the free. A book about the CIA by Victor Marchetti and John Marks had to be published with 168 portions purged by court order. A second CIA expose by Phillip Agee is being read in Great Britain but not in the United States, because American publishers fear legal reprisals.

- The Ford administration is pushing a bill that would permit reporters to be imprisoned for revealing public papers and proceedings that have not been officially approved for release, whether or not the papers deal with national security.

- In Hawaii, 10 state senators have carried this trend to its logical conclusion by intro-

ducing legislation that would require newspapers and broadcasters to submit to the state government justification, corroboration and an assessment of the expected "social impact" of an editorial within 14 days of publication.

Thus, with a quickening pace, the vanguard of totalitarianism is gaining ground in America. Its advance agents — a Sixth Column of politicians, prosecutors, judges, legislators and bureaucrats — are busily gnawing away at the great pillar of our freedom: the First Amendment.

This, the first precious freedom in the Bill of Rights, proclaims our right to speak our minds, to inform ourselves, to read, publish, assemble and worship without the approval of the government.

The Founding Fathers, who knew all about the aggrandizing proclivities of officeholders, drafted the First Amendment in a way calculated to prevent government from getting around it:

"Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." No law. That should have ended it.

But over the centuries, the rights of free men, though they be chiseled in stone, are not much stronger than the people's determination to defend them.

For the Sixth Column is always at work, and its first target is always the press, because the press is the vehicle through which the other freedoms find

expression and defense. Those who are responsible for the spread of Nixonism need not be in a conspiracy with one another. The invisible bond that unites them is a common wish to suppress whatever embarrasses or indicts them or makes it difficult for them to control events within their particular jurisdictions.

The motives of the Nixonites may be lofty or ignoble. The prosecutor who wants to flush out a reporter's source may want evidence from that source or may be trying to silence him.

The judge who sanitizes his courtroom from the public eye may be trying overzealously to protect the rights of a defendant, or he may be doing a favor for a friend, or he may not want to have his judicial rulings second-guessed by the public.

The bureaucrat who resists seekers of information and the legislator who wants to put them in jail may be moved merely by a Colonel Blimp concept of the national good. Or they may be trying to cover up wrongdoing, or acting on the Nixon assumption that the press is the enemy and the more the press is muzzled the better it is for officials as a class.

Whatever the motive of the Nixonites, they seek a power, a control, an orderliness, an immunity which the First Amendment precisely forbids him to seize or aspire to: "Congress shall make no law..."

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