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Peter J. Bridge carrying belongings from jail in Newark

Reporter Who Was Silent Freed From Newark Jail

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NEWARK, Oct. 24—Peter J. Bridge, the first newsman to be imprisoned since the United States Supreme Court ruled last June that newsmen could be compelled to answer grand jury questions regarding criminal cases, was released today from the Essex County Jail in Newark.

"It feels very good to be out," the 36-year-old Mr. Bridge said. "But I'd do it again if I had to."

At the time of his release, Mr. Bridge was serving his 20th day in jail under a citation for contempt issued after he had refused to answer questions that went beyond what he had written in the now-defunct Evening News in Newark early this year.

The story in question reported that Mrs. Pearl Beatty, a member of the Newark Housing Commission, had said that an unidentified man had offered her \$10,000 to control her vote for a new Housing Authority executive director.

'Witness Is Released'

After answering more than 50 grand jury questions, Mr. Bridge balked at going beyond what he had written, contending that he was protected in his refusal by First Amendment guarantees of freedom of the press. His contentions have been denied in the New Jersey courts.

It was exactly 4:10 P.M. on the big wall clock in Courtroom 602 when Superior Court Judge James R. Giuliano pronounced the words Mr. Bridge

had been waiting almost three weeks to hear: "The witness is released from custody."

The release of Mr. Bridge, who appeared in court a few minutes after 4, wearing a green double-breasted blazer, black trousers and a red and white figured shirt open at the neck, coincided with the expiration of the grand jury.

Mr. Bridge, who lives in Belleville, N. J., with his pregnant wife and two children, had been sentenced to an indefinite term, which began on Oct. 4, until he either answered the questions or the grand jury was dismissed.

The jury had handed up a presentment to Judge Giuliano on Oct. 13, who sealed it until the nine persons it criticized had been given an opportunity to request private hearings. Mr. Bridge was among the nine, and both he and his lawyer, Edward Gilhooly, affirmed in court yesterday that he did not desire such a hearing.

En route to his family yesterday, Mr. Bridge, who had predicted that no one would be indicted by the grand jury, maintained that the presentment had been written by the Essex County Prosecutor, Joseph P. Lordi, and said:

"I don't think it was an investigation. They heard testimony, and they relied on newspaper clippings. The grand jury just placed a stamp of approval on the prosecutor's work."

Mr. Bridge told newsmen: "They didn't yield, and I didn't yield. They won in court, I won in the end; we won in the end."