

Stanton Calls for an Absolute Newsman's Privilege

By ALBIN KREBS

Frank Stanton, vice chairman of the Columbia Broadcasting System, called yesterday for Federal legislation to create an absolute newsman's privilege.

As recently as last October, C.B.S. went on record favoring a qualified and limited Federal shield statute, Dr. Stanton said. But, he added, "We now believe it necessary to enact legislation to create an absolute newsman's privilege, which would apply not only to the Federal Government, but to the states, regardless of present shield laws, or lack of them."

In a speech at the University of Georgia at Athens, Dr. Stanton said that C.B.S. had changed its stand because of "the dismaying and very serious assault that has developed, in the courts and elsewhere, against newsmen's rights and the public's right to receive an unrestricted flow of information."

Dr. Stanton noted that in recent months, four newsmen went to jail for refusing to divulge information of a confidential nature to courts or grand juries, and that at least a half-dozen others faced jail sentences for defying court orders.

He also referred to a Supreme Court decision that held narrowly that journalists have

no general First Amendment right to resist answering material questions put to them by grand juries, and to the unsuccessful attempt of a Congressional committee to use the subpoena power to force C.B.S. to turn over nonbroadcast materials connected with a documentary.

These developments may be linked with Government attempts at prior restraint in the publication of the Pentagon Papers, Dr. Stanton said, and to the Administration's coupling of a broadcast-license-renewal bill with a warning to network affiliates to "jump on" the networks for alleged bills in network news.

Speaks for Media

Because of these assaults on freedom on information, he went on, Congress should enact legislation providing that "no person shall be required in any Federal or state proceeding to disclose either the source of any published or unpublished information obtained for any medium of communication to the public, or any unpublished information obtained or prepared in gathering or processing information for any public medium of communication."

The law, Dr. Stanton said, should apply to newspapers and magazines, books, pamphlets, news services, radio and TV. He said further that protection of unpublished informa-

tion "should extend to notes, photographs, outtakes, tapes, any data of whatever sort that are not in themselves disseminated to the public."

Julian Goodman, president of the National Broadcasting Company, said on Jan. 3 that N.B.C. would support a Federal law to give newsmen "absolute protection in maintaining the confidentiality of their sources."

Elmer Lower, president of American Broadcasting Company News, said yesterday, "in principle, we certainly agree with Dr. Stanton's viewpoint."