

## Press Barred from Santa Rita Jail

On Thursday, August 19, 1971, the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California filed suit on behalf of a newspaper, the LIVERMORE INDEPENDENT, and one of its reporters, Bruce Henderson. Named as defendants in the federal action are Alameda County Sheriff Frank Madigan and two of his deputies, in their capacities as custodians of the Alameda County jail at Santa Rita.

Henderson alleges that he has been unable to write articles on conditions at Santa Rita because a jail rule prohibiting newspapermen from interviewing inmates has thwarted his reportorial investigation. Santa Rita inmates contend that they are abused and ill-fed. They claim that Santa Rita operates a large livestock farm to provide meat for inmates but that the cattle disappear in mysterious vehicles for unknown destinations and that the prisoners, consequently, rarely have a decent meal. Henderson has been unable to confirm or disprove these stories because he cannot talk directly to any inmates.

The ACLU contends that the rule prohibiting Henderson from interviewing inmates violates the free press guarantees of the Constitution and the public's right to know how its institutions are being run. ACLU's Paul Halvonik points out that jails throughout California and the rest of the United States permit newspapermen to interview inmates and reasons that "the interviewing of inmates obviously poses no significant security problem. Madigan simply would rather we not bother discovering what's going on at Santa Rita but that desire can hardly override the First Amendment."

The suit asks the Federal Court to order Madigan to desist from interfering with newspaper access to prisoners.