

6 Oct 72

[Second half of editorial, "Free Press Behind Bars," on refusal of Supreme Court to stay imprisonment on contempt-of court charges of Peter J. Bridge.]

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Unfortunately, the tide of judicial thinking generally seems to be slipping away from defense of the public's right to know, as set forth in the Constitution. The all-embracing order just issued by the Federal judge in the Watergate case in Washington prohibiting anyone connected with the case from making any public statements about it seems to go to the ultimate in downgrading the First Amendment's guarantee of free press in the always delicate balance with the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of fair trial.

While the fixing of a boundary between these two fundamental constitutional rights is admittedly difficult in many cases, Judge John J. Sirica has apparently opted for the practically total submergence of one in favor of the other. Indeed, his gag on public comment is so sweeping that he himself is unable to say whether it would prohibit Senator McGovern or other Democrats from discussing the raid on Democratic headquarters, which has properly become a major issue in the Presidential campaign.

The need has never been clearer for shoring up through legislative reinforcement the freedom the First Amendment is designed to provide for a resolute and independent press operating in the interest of an informed public.

[End.]