

Agnew Reporting Called Biased

By William O'Brien

The press has been unfettered and irresponsible in its reporting of criminal allegations, especially speculative charges against Vice President Spiro Agnew, the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association of Northern California was told here yesterday.

"The press, in short, has no duty to guarantee the conviction of a person before trial," said Superior Judge Arthur L. Alarcon of Los Angeles.

Judge Alarcon was chief speaker at the one-day Criminal Law Seminar held by the association in the Hilton Hotel. He received enthusiastic applause from about 150 in attendance.

Judge Alarcon detailed five days of headline stories printed last week about the Vice President's possible involvement in illegal kick-back payments. He noted that no news account was attributed to an identifiable source.

"You see a man who has yet to be indicted by any-

body — except publications and Newsweek Magazine — the subject of the most prejudicial publicity," the judge added.

"A jury should decide the guilt or innocence, not an investigative reporter, not an editor and not a publisher," said Alarcon.

The judge noted that publishers and broadcast executives have insisted being guided only by loosely drawn guidelines whereby the press agrees to publish only what the public "needs to know" about pending criminal matters.

"On the public's right to know," observe Alarcon, "I don't need to know gossip; I don't need to know rumors; and I don't need to know rumors or leaked information from some government official — if that official ever really existed."

The judge viewed the treatment of the Agnew allegations as a trigger for awakening the public to the dangers of pretrial publicity.