

U.S. Press Is Praised In Report on Watergate

Geneva

The role played by American newsmen in the Watergate affair showed their determination to "use their right to defend — together with press freedom — the freedoms of the country," the International Press Institute contends.

In its annual report on press freedom, written by its director, Ernest Meyer, the institute found that in the world at large, the "right of the people to diversified, complete and well-balanced information suffers from an endemic erosion.

But the study went on to stress the "exemplary role" played by the press in the U.S.

"The importance of the press in its role of watchdog is recorded bitterly and sometimes with hostility by the victims of 'investigative reporting,'" the institute said.

The study noted that by revealing the facts and defending legality, the press turned Watergate into a "nationwide affair."

"It is this fact," the institute continued, "which justified the statement that, in

this permanent confrontation between the administration and legislative and judicial authorities, the press has contributed to the defense of the belief that a free press conditions the existence of a free and independent judiciary."

The institute is a private organization supported by about 1750 editors and publishers in more than 60 non-Communist countries. Its headquarters are in Zurich.

In other comments, the report said that hopes that the convening of the European conference on security and cooperation had raised that the Soviet Union would liberalize its information policy "soon faded."

"On the contrary," it added, "a new inflexibility is to be seen within the country," and cited measures taken in the Soviet Union against dissident intellectuals.

The report found that China is "reciprocating" the goodwill being shown it by the Western world by the "opening of the doors" to western journalists.

The report criticized government control over radio and television in France. "The government," it says, "is obviously not prepared to grant those it considers to be the 'voice of France' the freedom of expression which those responsible for the BBC have managed to defend against all comers."

The condition of press freedom in Latin America is "agonizing," the institute said, but such a state is "endemic" to the region.

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