

Stanton Says F.C.C. Pressure Jeopardizes Coverage of News

By WALTER RUGABER

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 29—Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, charged today that the Federal Government was intensifying its regulatory pressures and jeopardizing independent radio and television news.

Mr. Stanton, during an appearance before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, directed his criticism primarily at the Federal Communications Commission and what he termed its "unreasonable" application of the fairness doctrine.

Under the doctrine, broadcasters are required to present all sides of a public controversy. While Mr. Stanton discussed the journalistic implications, the rule has also been used to force stations to use antismoking messages.

C.B.S. had no difficulty with the doctrine in the past, Mr. Stanton said, because it only reflected the network's basic goal, "to present public issues fairly." But now, he went on, C.B.S. coverage is subject to "microscopic examination."

"As commission scrutiny over our judgments intensifies, prolonged administrative and judicial proceedings are inevitable, if only to untangle the factual morass which inevitably results from over-close analysis of these highly subjective matters," he said.

'Inappropriate Function'

"Although some on the commission fully agree that deep involvement in day-to-day journalistic practices is an inappropriate function of government, the trend unfortunately continues in the opposite direction," he said.

Once the commission examined 28 pages of correspondence for five months, Mr. Stanton said, before confirming that a nine-minute feature on bullfighting was not a controversial question of public importance.

On another occasion, he complained, the commission counted the number of lines of broadcast script and apparently relied on the result in finding that a Miami station had not offered enough information about one side.

A number of F.C.C. rulings on the fairness doctrine have been appealed. If the courts uphold them, Mr. Stanton cautioned, they will "adversely affect broadcasters' ability to provide fair, balanced, and meaningful coverage of public issues."

Representative Ogden R. Reid, republican of Westchester, also testified at the subcommittee's hearings on freedom of the press and accused the F.C.C. of "overzealousness"

in warning stations to screen music that contains lyrics about drugs.

As a result, Mr. Reid said, Congress may need to make "more explicit" its 1934 mandate forbidding the commission to exercise "the power of censorship" or interfere with "the right of free speech."

Reid Would Bar Injunctions

On a related issue, Mr. Reid suggested legislation to prohibit court injunctions against publication. These were used to prevent, for 15 days, publication of the Pentagon papers by The New York Times and other newspapers.

"No conceivable restriction upon the press is more dangerous than prior restraint," he said, adding that it should be used only in cases touching upon "the very survival of the nation and under circumstances far more dire than those presented in the Pentagon papers case."

Mr. Reid also brought up the subpoenaing of reporters and their notes, saying that if the Supreme Court denies newsmen protection from the disclosure of confidential information Congress should legislate such protection.

Mr. Stanton, who recently resisted successfully a House subpoena of material used in preparation of a documentary on Pentagon public relations activities, also supported a proposed newsmen's privilege bill.

But, he added, journalists should be protected against the forced disclosure of "not just that which is explicitly 'confidential' but all information which has not been broadcast or published."

The final witness before the subcommittee today was Rich-



United Press International

SCORES F.C.C. RULE: Frank Stanton, president of C.B.S., at Senate hearing. He charged the agency with "unreasonable" application of the fairness doctrine.

ard J. Barnet, an author who is co-director of the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies. He called for protection against interference with "public scholars."

These scholars undertake extensive investigations of important public questions that are increasingly valuable as the issues become more complex and as daily journalism finds them more difficult to cover.