

Newsmen,

U.S. Clash

On Sources

SF Chronicle

WASHINGTON — (AP) — The government and news media representatives clashed today over the right of newsmen to protect their confidential sources by refusing to disclose them to courts or other government agencies.

Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Cramton said Justice Department guidelines already afford newsmen all the protection they need against abuses of government power.

But representatives of the news media said recent court decisions and a trend toward secrecy in government make it necessary for Congress to enact a law to keep reporters from being sent to jail for refusing to reveal their sources.

Several Bills

The witnesses testified before a House Judiciary subcommittee headed by Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier, (D-Wis.) which is considering several bills designed to protect newsmen against such treatment.

Kastenmeier said the Justice Department guidelines, however worthy, "can be changed at the whim of whoever happens to be in the Justice Department." They were issued in 1970 by then Attorney General John Mitchell.

"Given the recent history of events it is understandable that the press is apprehensive," Kastenmeier said.

The guidelines call for negotiations between the Justice Department and a newsman from whom information is being sought.

"The Attorney General will not request a subpoena under the guidelines unless the information is essential to a successful investigation of a serious crime, the information is not available from non-press sources, and the subpoena is limited and reasonable in time and scope," Cramton said.

Would Require Proof

The bills before the subcommittee vary, but the one favored by the news media witnesses would require the government to prove in federal court that the information it seeks is vital to the prosecution and is not available from any other source.

The government would also have to prove an overriding national interest.

Testimony in favor of the bill was given by Robert G. Fichenberg, chairman of the Freedom of Information Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors; John R. Finnegan, chairman of the Freedom of Information committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association; Chet Casselman of San Francisco, president of the Radio Television News Directors Association; Jack Bradley, president of the National Press Photographers Association, and Guy Ryan, president of Sigma Delta Chi.