

Newark Reporter Goes to Jail To Serve Contempt Sentence

Special to The New York Times

NEWARK, Oct. 4—Peter J. Bridge, a reporter who worked for the defunct Evening News here, surrendered this morning to begin serving an indeterminate sentence for contempt of court for his refusal to answer five questions before an Essex County grand jury investigating possible corruption in the Newark Housing Authority.

"I don't feel good about going to jail, in fact, I feel lousy, just lousy, but I will not answer the questions and buckle under to the intimidation of a prosecutor's office or any government agency," he asserted.

"If I answer the questions, I would compromise the meaning of a free press," Mr. Bridge told an impromptu news conference on the steps of the Essex County Courthouse.

An hour later, at 10 A.M., after a last-minute appeal for a lighter sentence was rejected by Superior Court Judge H. Curtis Meanor, Mr. Bridge was fingerprinted and admitted to the Essex County Jail here.

Thus he became the first reporter to serve a jail term since the United States Supreme Court ruled last June 29 that newsmen did not enjoy constitutional protection against having to reveal confidential sources or information to a grand jury.

Yesterday, for the second time, the Supreme Court denied Mr. Bridge's appeal for a stay of the sentence. Last week Judge Meanor, who was a sports writer for The Plainfield

Courier News in 1940 before entering college, denied an appeal to stay the sentence until Mr. Bridge's pregnant wife, Ann, gave birth.

Mrs. Bridge is two days overdue in her pregnancy. The couple, who live in the suburb of Belleville, have two other children, an 11-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter.

Mr. Bridge, 36 years old, a reporter for The Evening News for 11 years, wrote an article on May 5 saying that a Newark Housing Authority Commissioner, Mrs. Pearl Beatty, said she had been offered a bribe.

The questions Mr. Bridge refused to answer before the grand jury dealt with the identity of the persons who reportedly offered the bribe, what the bribe was for and whether any commissioners of the Housing Authority had been harassed.

He was convicted on July 7 and sentenced to serve until he either answered the five questions or until the grand jury was discharged. The panel is scheduled to be discharged Oct. 30, but twice before it has been extended, first for 90 days and then for 45 days.

Mr. Bridge, who has been doing freelance writing since The Evening News ceased publication last month, could conceivably remain in jail beyond the Oct. 30 date. Neither the Prosecutor's office nor the assignment judge, James R. Giuliano, who must approve an extension, declined to speculate on whether the grand jury would be extended.