

Pig Media Joins Police

Liberation News Service

1970

NEW YORK (LNS) — On January 26, two men identifying themselves as “being from the government” dropped a subpoena off at CBS.

The FBI and the Secret Service wanted to get their hands on all the tapes, memos, notes, letters and telephone calls that CBS has concerning the Black Panther Party from mid-1968 to the present, as well as the unedited tapes—outtakes—of interviews with Panther leaders David Hilliard and Eldridge Cleaver.

CBS declared their “total opposition to subpoenas so broad in scope.” *The New York Times* gave the story front page play.

On January 27, CBS announced that it would turn over the material to the FBI. The *Times* moved the story to page 87. CBS News closed its well-known eye and shut its mouth.

Soon afterwards, the Justice Department subpoenaed *Newsweek*, *Time* and *Life* magazine’s unedited files on the Weatherman faction of SDS. Then a California federal grand jury indicted a *New York Times* reporter from the *Times* San Francisco bureau and ordered him to testify about the Panthers.

As a leaflet distributed by New York media workers (including CBS employees, who picketed the “Black Rock,” CBS’s slab-like national headquarters building) put it, “Employees of CBS and other media corporations can no longer ignore the fact that their executives are turning them into police agents.”

In the face of such developments as the nationwide campaign to destroy the Black Panther Party—by outright murder, by mass arrests for conspiracy, by midnight machine gun-toting raids, by constant police harassment—reporters from the straight press can no longer feel free to try to relate “fairly” to the Panthers.

The recent rash of subpoenas compromises some newsmen’s sense of “professionalism,” the traditional inviolability of the Source. Thus the media world has been thrown into turmoil over the subpoena issue.

On the one hand, the “professional integrity” even of high-placed news executives tells them not to give in to governmental pressure. On the other hand, those reporters and executives like CBS’ Richard S. Salant (who made the corporation’s first strong anti-subpoena statement and then ended up turning the information over) are not at all ready to oppose the government in any real way.

Other reporters, who plan to refuse to cooperate with the government, see the subpoena as part of a growing repression of militant people’s movements.

In Chicago, where all four newspapers and several television stations have been approached with demands for information on both the Panthers and Weathermen, a group of establishment reporters are getting together a defense fund to help out people who refuse to answer their subpoenas.

One man who will not talk to the government or give over his notes is a black reporter from one of the national newsmagazines. He was granted a confidential briefing by a top Weatherman before the national action in Chicago in October. He told LNS, “We have to get to rethinking our role. They seem to be trying to turn us into the second arm of the police force.”

He pointed out that subpoenas can have a direct and seriously adverse effect on the free flow of information and access to news sources.”

CBS News lawyers have been instructed to contest demands of this nature as soon as appropriate cases are presented, explained Walter Cronkite.

CBS plans to comply anyway with the subpoenas involving information about the Panthers. Presumably this case at hand is not “appropriate,” and presumably CBS is not too worried about its “adverse effect” on the Black Panther Party.

Adverse effects on the movements as a whole make for another problem that of a kind of self-imposed news blackout.

A movement group might grant an interview, for example, that would be useful in presenting a radical perspective on an issue to a wide audience. Because an interviewer from the straight press may be an “honorable man,” movement people will deal with him honestly.

They may provide him with information that is necessary if he is to write as well-balanced a story as is possible in the mass media, but it may be information that is needed for background only, be used punitively against reporters as well as against the movement. “They can call you to testify every week or so, keep you collecting your stuff, turning it in. If they don’t want you writing certain kinds of stuff, or relating well to groups like the Panthers, they’ll just keep subpoenaing you, and you won’t have any time left to work.”

CBS, after “changing their mind” once about whether or not to abide by the subpoenas, declared piously on Feb. 3 that “Broad, unrestricted access to reporters notes, notebooks, and other materials not published or broadcast can and should not be made public”.

Now we can not be at all sure that such confidential material, necessary if the mass media is to have a realistic understanding of the movement, will not see print some day—in an FBI report.

One consequence of these developments is that the movement may have to rely much more heavily on our own radical media.

Even those reporters who have enjoyed some measure of trust from the movement are not necessarily willing to risk their necks by refusing to answer a subpoena. A *Times* reporter who covered SDS activities last spring ended up testifying before the House Internal Security Committee, formerly known as HUAC.

Another *New York Times* reporter, close to movement people, remarked, “Any kind of dissenters, if they have any brains, are going to be very wary of talking to reporters.”

Sidebar: Out, Demon

NEW YORK (LNS) — Judge Julius J. Hoffman, who is presiding over the Chicago Conspiracy trial, has been condemned by Columbia University’s Radical Jewish Union for becoming the servant “of a repressive white ruling power structure.”

The Union is planning a ceremony to exorcise the “dybbuk,” which they say has entered Hoffman’s body. According to Jewish legend, a dybbuk is an evil, demonic soul which enters the body of a weak and susceptible person.

fifth Estate

Liberation News Service
Pig Media Joins Police
1970

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/99-february-19-march-4-1970/pig-media-joins-police>
Fifth Estate #99, February 19-March 4, 1970

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net