

Bridge: newsmen must be immune

by Tim Anderson and H.J. Cummins

A shield law which doesn't grant a reporter total immunity is no shield at all, Peter Bridge told a University of Nebraska at Omaha freedom of information seminar Thursday.

Bridge spent 20 days in prison in 1972 for refusing to show a judge unpublished parts of a Newark (N.J.) News story he had written about an alleged bribing of a local housing official.

Shield laws are statutes designed to protect a reporter from having to reveal unpublished information or the source of news stories.

New Jersey has a shield law which protects newsmen, Bridges said. But the law says reporters cannot invoke their privilege in a courtroom cross-examination, he explained.

Sigma Delta Chi, a national journalism society, is trying to push shield legislation through each state legislature and the Congress.

"Before I went to jail, newspapermen were talking publicly about enactment of a qualified immunity act," Bridge said. "Now they agree the only effective immunity is absolute immunity. And this time (newsmen) are coming with the people behind them."

Sources want to remain anonymous because they are afraid of embarrassment, harassment or even death, he said.

A reporter promises a source anonymity when necessary because "the single purpose for obtaining information is to get it to the public," he said. "The issue here is not the reporters' rights it is every citizen's right to have a free flow of information."

Bridge said reporters know the "real process" in Congress and so will not let the congressmen "do what they do to their constituents. They usually water down a bill (by adding amendments which erase its intent) and then pass it, telling their constituency 'we've tried,'" he said. "We know better—nothing less than absolute immunity is enough."

He said there is irresponsibility in the press "but I don't think it can be legislated out of existence. I'd cast my lot with newsmen for ability or fiber any day—before (I would with) the Supreme Court, for example."

Omaha World-Herald city hall reporter David Thompson said he doesn't believe the shield law will disallow the accused (if a story discloses information about a government official, for example) to be confronted by their accuser, that is, the reporter.

David Hamer, assistant news director of KMTV, Omaha, said his only concern is if Congress can pass legislation giving absolute protection to reporters, can they later take it away at will?

Bridge indicated newsmen have turned to legislators because the 5-4 Supreme Court decision which ordered subpoenaed reporters to testify at grand juries, left the press no where else to turn.

Mick Rood, city news editor for the Omaha Sun newspapers, said he agreed with a dissenting Supreme Court Justice's statement that "the press has a preferred position in our constitutional theme."

The press is responsible for protecting the Constitution by disseminating information, Rood said, "and to say they are not special is nonsense."

Excess plants afflict Lincoln lakes

by Ruth Ulrich

Eutrophication is a relatively new word in the language of the layman, but it being used quite often by zoologists, according to Gary Hergenrader, UNL associate professor of zoology, Wednesday evening in the Nebraska Union.

Hergenrader defined this term as "the increase in nutrient content of a lake or pond with time" at the second presentation the Environmental Information Series. The series is sponsored jointly by the ASUN Environmental Task Force and the Union Talks and Topics Committee.

Limnologists, or specialists in the study of lakes, are mostly concerned with its manifestations and effects, he said. They usually talk about the undesirable effects, but there also are desirable ones, Hergenrader said.

They classify lakes according to their productivity. He said the two main classifications are oligotrophic or unproductive lakes, and eutrophic or production lakes.

Lakes start out unproductive, he said, but they become productive as nutrients, usually nitrogen and phosphorus, are introduced, by either naturally or by man.

As the nutrients in a lake increase, the small plants are eventually replaced by blue-green algae which forms a scum on the surface of the lake, he explained. As the number of plants increase, so does the number of animals.

"Up to a point," he said, "it is well to have a fertilized lake, but after that point even many fish can no longer survive, and populations go out of balance."

He went on to examine changes in the Salt Valley Reservoirs, established as flood protection for Lincoln.

Wagon Train and Holmes Lakes have little eutrophication, Hergenrader said this is because they are always muddy. Therefore light, which is essential for plant and animal life, cannot enter the water, he said.

However, Pawnee, Branched Oak and Stagecoach, which are Lincoln's clearwater lakes, are filled with dense growths of algae, he said. This growth occurs because they are constructed in extremely fertile areas where they receive run-off nutrients from the soil and from nearby feedlots.



Gary Hergenrader, UNL zoologist . . . discussed lakes and plant growth Wednesday night at the second talk in the Environmental Information Series.

Faculty member co-authors book

A UNL faculty member is the co-author of a new college textbook on concepts and theories of the sociology of education.

Keith Prichard, UNL associate professor of history and philosophy of education, wrote the text with Thomas H. Buxton of the University of South Carolina.

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