

Inside, outside pressures on news talk of RTNDA

Speakers Smith and Salant note court decisions and regulatory impingements on First Amendment; Small warns of blurring lines between journalism, entertainment

Meeting at Caesar's Palace hotel last week, the Radio-Television News Directors Association heard a number of its featured speakers lambast recent court decisions that, they felt, have hampered all journalists in pursuing news stories.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court has allowed government organizations to embark on "Nazi-like" raids of newspaper and broadcast newsrooms, said Howard K. Smith, former ABC News commentator, in the conference keynote address last Thursday.

Recent court decisions, he said, have made it possible for police organizations in this country to act like the Gestapo in pre-World War II Germany. "It can happen here," said Smith before a packed meeting of the nation's news directors.

It was a wide-ranging speech that in addition to addressing the growing erosion of First Amendment guarantees as a result of Supreme Court decisions, also touched, briefly, on Smith's own controversial parting of the ways with ABC News last April.

But Smith reserved his most biting comments for the Supreme Court, which he said had grown in power over the past 25

years, far more than any branch of the federal government. "And we can't even get an interview with a member," he said. "It is certainly not the media that have caused the court to grow."

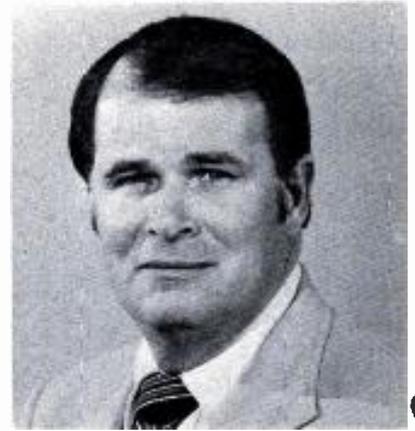
He also called the court's ruling that judges can, if they choose, close pretrial hearings "untenable, undemocratic and certainly un-American."

His acrimonious comments on the direction of the court under Chief Justice Warren Burger did not carry over in Smith's speech to a call for legislative relief, however. "Let us stand with our simple, beautiful First Amendment," he said. "Let those few words not be overgrown or complicated." He cautioned that requests for congressional relief from court decisions could result in laws far more restrictive, ultimately, than U.S. news organizations have ever known—legislative solutions that could parallel Great Britain's Official Secrets Act.

"We must be cautious with the weapons we choose to fight with," Smith warned.

Elsewhere, Smith said: "The assault by the American judiciary, led by the Supreme Court, is almost vicious in nature."

■ CBS News President Bill Leonard warned RTNDA members against a growing tendency in broadcast journalism that results in reporting in which the "viewer can't tell where fiction ends and fact begins." In a speech delivered Friday morning, the CBS executive said that there is a "great danger" that the broadcast news profession may be "blurring the lines between news and entertainment, between journalistic and artistic creativity."



Hogan: next in line for president.

With the rise of magazine programs—lead by his own network's *60 Minutes* but including ABC News's *20/20*, NBC's *Prime Time Sunday* and Group W's *PM Magazine*—the relationship between news and entertainment is going through a "sea change," reflecting the growing importance of news in the competition among networks and among local stations. "The fictional world of television entertainment is eating up enormous amounts of "creative product," Leonard said. "Those in the entertainment end of the business know that there is hardly enough mediocrity to go around."

News, Leonard suggested, is in danger of providing some of that mediocrity.

"The concern of thoughtful people is not that news will swallow entertainment, but that news will become entertainment—give them bread and circuses, said the Roman rulers. News people, in the brief history of radio and television, have

InBrief

RCA put two holdings, Banquet Foods and Random House, on selling block late last week, but cautioned it would hold out, "of course," for "offers that reflected their full value." Taken together, firms are estimated to contribute 5% of communication giant's earnings, which last year were \$278.4 million. RCA President Edgar H. Griffiths tied offers to impending acquisition of CIT Financial Corp., saying "time now seems right" to sell them, and calling Banquet and Random House companies "not in industries that relate to our strategic plan for RCA's long-range development." Griffiths stressed, however, that these sales are not related to funding CIT's purchase.

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CBS, meanwhile, also appears to be in acquisition frame of mind. Company has confirmed announcement issued late Thursday by New Jersey insurance holding company **Crum & Forster** that said CBS had approached it for "brief preliminary discussion" for possible acquisition. Insurer's chairman, B.P. Russell, termed discussions "unsolicited" and said "no offer has been made or any firm terms discussed." He concluded with evident warning that "it would be a mistake to conclude that Crum & Forster will necessarily be acquired by anybody." CBS isn't discussing subject. Price tag would have to be large: Crum & Forster's 13.7 million shares outstanding were trading Friday at \$57.75.

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Federal Election Commission last week **rejected proposal that would allow news media to sponsor campaign debates.** Under FEC regulations now pending before Congress, corporate funds can't be spent by sponsors of debates—prohibiting sponsorship by broadcasters. **Latest proposal would have allowed sponsorship by news media** that derive their financing from "subscribers and advertis-

ing." Broadcasters have complained to FEC that current regulations violate their First Amendment rights. FEC directed general counsel's office to come up with new proposal for consideration at next meeting, this Thursday (Sept. 13). Meanwhile, FCC was understood to be preparing to enter case. Commission, which in 1977 urged FEC not to adopt regulations in question, is expected to urge Congress to veto regulations, if FEC does not withdraw them. Commission's rationale, presumably, would be its concern that public be informed on political matters to extent possible, consistent with equal time law.

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Improvement Leasing Co. has urged FCC to issue order undoing its sale of woca-tv Washington to Taft Broadcasting. Improvement Leasing, which is reported to have received offer topping Taft's by some \$5 million, filed comments on Friday (see page 90), supporting motion of Washington Association for Television and Children which argues that transfer was effected before formal commission order approving sale was issued. Parties closed sale within minutes of 4-3 vote in open commission meeting. Commission is under court order to act on WATCH's motion by Thursday.

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Strike that would have involved 25,000 workers in television, film and motion picture production was averted last week when **International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees agreed to new three-year contract with Association of Motion Pictures and Television Producers.** Agreement came in Los Angeles last Wednesday (Sept. 5) after IATSE members, by wide margin, had voted for strike authorization previous week. Proposal is retroactive to last Aug. 1 and is subject to ratification by members. It calls for 85 cents-per-hour wage increase in first year, 90 cents in second and \$1 in third.

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Sheridan Broadcasting Corp., 49% owner of Mutual Black Network, has purchased balance of MBN from Mutual Broadcasting System for