

some of them, at least, spoke of their rights and the right of the press to have information handed out to them. The freedom of the press to publish news and to comment upon it, and the importance of preserving that right, has never been questioned. The press can publish any news they obtain, but they have no more right to demand that news be made available to them than any other member of the public. Mr. Smith, of the *Evening Post*, whose opinion I naturally respect, said that the right to obtain news was a necessary corollary to the right to publish news, otherwise the freedom of the press was illusory. That, I think, is not correct, and at any rate the press have never attempted to establish as an unquestionable right, the right to a hand-out of news in the possession of any person or body, public or private. That public bodies will be forced by public opinion to allow the press access to information on matters of public interest I can well believe, but even that is subject to a qualification that if decency or public interest requires postponement of publication of news, public opinion will insist that publication is postponed till those requirements are satisfied. I venture to doubt that public opinion will agree that this discretion should be delegated to the press, which, after all, is primarily interested in publication.

Regarding the incidents of delay and obstruction objectively they appear to me somewhat trivial, and I think altogether too much has been made of them by reporters who, accustomed to vantage points provided for them, and news handed to them in well-furnished locations, were somewhat disgruntled when they had to face a complete lack of arrangement for press reporting in the Ruapehu area.

I now set out the questions I have to answer and my answers to them:—

(1) Whether, having regard to all the conditions and circumstances surrounding the finding of the Electra aircraft and the recovery of the bodies therefrom, there was any undue or improper withholding of information from, or the imposition of any undue or improper restrictions upon press reporters in obtaining information and photographs for the purpose of publication by the newspapers they represented.

Answer: I find no undue delay or obstruction in the circumstances.

(2) If so, by whose orders or directions was such information withheld or restrictions imposed?

Answer: In view of my answer to the first question, no answer is required to this question.

(3) Whether arising out of the present inquiry it is expedient or practicable to lay down any general principles as to the privileges or freedom or obligations of the press in similar circumstances.

Answer: To this question my answer is that the circumstances of this particular inquiry and the evidence taken at it have not raised any matter that renders it expedient or practicable to lay down any general principles as to the privileges or freedom or obligations of the press in any circumstances.

[L.S.]

HAROLD F. JOHNSTON, Commissioner.

Dated at Wellington, this 31st day of January, 1949.

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