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Radical Press Gets Foothold at Capitol

By JAMES DOYLE
Star Staff Writer

The radical press has gained its first foothold in the Washington journalism establishment.

Thomas King Forcade, a "revolutionary" who once threw a pie in the face of the member of the U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, has been admitted to the House and Senate press galleries as Washington correspondent of the Underground Press Service (UPS).

Forcade's application to become an accredited congressional correspondent caused weeks of anguished debate among reporters on Capitol Hill.

Approved 3 to 2

It was quietly approved Thursday by a 3 to 2 vote of the Standing Committee of Correspondents of the U.S. Congress—five who are elected by their colleagues to oversee press rules for the Capitol.

Unlike the executive and judicial branches, Congress has traditionally allowed newsmen themselves to rule upon who is qualified to work in the press galleries, to use the free facilities and to have access to the hearing rooms and inner corridors of the Congress.

Forcade's status, most of the participants in the controversy say, stems not from his connection with unorthodox newspapers. Rather, they say, it is Forcade himself and his past action which brought angry denunciations and strong defenses from accredited journalists.

Incident Recalled

During a meeting of the U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in the spring of 1970, Forcade, then 27, showed up as a star witness against the very idea of such a commission.

He identified himself as a clergyman, testified in a series of expletives, then pulled a cream pie from a box and hit Commissioner Otto Larsen in the face with it. He was not arrested.

At least one reporter who was present that day, Allan W. Cromley of the Daily Oklahoman, offered to testify against Forcade for the standing committee.

Another reporter, Luther Houston of Editor and Publisher magazine, objected to accrediting Forcade because, he said, in a meeting of a journalistic fraternal society in San Diego Forcade threw a glass at the press table.

Group Assailed

In July, Forcade put out a statement calling the standing committee "a group of puppet journalists," and offered a series of press clippings about himself as his "credentials" for accreditation.

The Village Voice said of him: "Forcade is a rare and mysterious figure on the left. At times he seems like a shadowy outlaw on inexplicable missions. Other times he is an above ground spokesman and writer for the underground press and the White Panthers . . . one of the few people in the left who has enough skill and intelligence to outwit the hip capitalists at their own media games."

All of this, plus complaints about the level of reliable reporting in the radical press, finally was disregarded by a majority of the standing committee as irrelevant to their measurement of his qualifications.

Qualifications Debated

But for several weeks there was a good deal of discussion about whether Forcade met the technical qualifications of membesrhip—which are broad, but have in the past been used to deny accreditation to some distinguished newsmen, among them I. F. Stone, who publishes a leftwing biweekly newsletter, and Seymour Hersh, freelance reporter who broke the story of the My-Lai massacre.

During the weeks the matter was being discussed, members of the standing committee received inquiring phone calls about the progress of the appli-

cation from the office of Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y.; Richard Harwood, assisting managing editor of the Washington Post, and from Nicholas Von Hoffman, a Post columnist.

Fred P. Graham, Supreme Court reporter for the New York Times and a founding member of a reporters' committee on freedom of the press, once accompanied Forcade to session with the members of the standing committee to vouch for him.

Two Voted No

Two of the five members, Chairman Frank Hewlett of the Salt Lake City Tribune nd Sam Hanna, correspondent for a string of Southern and Midwestern newspapers, voted against Forcade.

The three younger members of the committee (all in their 40s) voted to grant accrediation, noting that the tradition has been to accept candidates on good faith if they meet the basic qualifications. They are Dan K. Thomasson of the Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance, Steven Gerstel of United Press International and Marjorie Hunter of the New York Times.

The standing committee still could be overruled by the Rules Committees of Congress.

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