



Chicago Tribune

Jay McMullen sweating under the glare of lights.

## Byrne bars Tribune — sic transition gloria

Jay McMullen was sweating profusely under the hot lights of a half dozen television cameras and the heavy breathing of more than 50 representatives of the national and local press as he sought to obfuscate Mayor Jane Byrne's failure to enforce their order barring the *Chicago Tribune* from the City Hall press room. Only when the lights were turned off did he mop his brow with a handkerchief, explaining that anyone who does so on camera looks like he's guilty of something.

That was perhaps the clearest explanation City Hall gave of anything that Monday morning. McMullen insisted that "the order stands." On the other hand, he wasn't going to have the locks changed or the desk removed. The Tribune Company was a "rent-free squatter" on city property. Maybe it would get a bill. Maybe everybody would get a bill. Maybe nobody would. The Mayor would not require the *Tribune* to submit questions in writing, but maybe some department heads would. The *Tribune* was staging a sit-in. No, the Mayor would not call the cops to evict the sitters-in, City Hall's usual practice.

Bob Davis, the *Tribune's* regular City Hall correspondent, after asking McMullen a question about the Mayor's schedule and getting an answer, introduced a colleague. Davis identified Jerry Crimmins as a *Tribune* reporter who was "helping me out today" and told McMullen that Crimmins had a question. McMullen answered it, thus establishing that City Hall would respect the journalistic privileges of the

*Tribune* institutionally rather than of Davis as an individual. (There had been rumors that *Tribune* reporters other than Davis would be barred.)

Crimmins had asked why, if the Mayor had not bothered to read the report of her transition team—the subject of the *Tribune* story that led to the press room controversy—she had asked for the study in the first place. McMullen replied that the Mayor never did ask for such a report, and said Northwestern urbanologist Louis Masotti, the transition chief, "had no assignment to do an analysis of city government in thirty days with a bunch of college students." The transition team "went far beyond their assignment and jurisdiction," he said.

But Don Rose and Paul McGrath, both confidants of Byrne when the transition team was created, say that its purpose was to come up with policy and program recommendations. Rose says that while nothing was put in writing that he knows of, the transition team's mandate "was loose enough to encompass something like this (the transition report) and certainly would not have prohibited it." McGrath reported in the May issue of *Chicago* magazine that Byrne "tapped Masotti to be the head of a transition team that would recommend changes in city government."

In any case, the report was shelved at City Hall, reportedly because of unflattering references to some members of the previous administration with whom Byrne subsequently made amends. *Chicago Lawyer* won a lawsuit ordering release of the report, but the city appealed on the ground that personnel matters contained in the report

could not be made public. Former Alderman Dick Simpson, a member of the transition team, had a copy of his section of the report dealing with the performance of city agencies and made it available to *Chicago Lawyer* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. It was understood at *Chicago Lawyer*, but not, apparently, at the *Sun-Times*, that the *Sun-Times* would publish its account on June 29, the day before *Chicago Lawyer* would appear on newsstands. However, the *Sun-Times* prepared to publish its story on June 22. Rob Warden, editor of *Chicago Lawyer*, remonstrated with Ralph Otwell, editor of the *Sun-Times*, who agreed to try to pull the story from the June 22 paper, parts of which already had been made up in page forms. Late on the evening of June 20, a *Sun-Times* editor told Warden—incorrectly, as it turned out—that the *Sun-Times* was in fact going to run the story that weekend. Angered, Warden called an editor at the *Tribune* and interested her in the story. Attorney William Bowe, who had been preparing *Chicago Lawyer's* analysis of the report, briefed *Tribune* reporters George de Lama and Storer Rowley in the early morning hours of June 21, and the story was splashed all over the front page of the Sunday paper. The first Sunday edition of the *Sun-Times*, however, did not contain the story—Warden's informant had seen early page proofs—but it was reinserted in subsequent editions.

And that is how the *Tribune*, rather than the *Sun-Times*, came to feel the Mayor's ire.

And why this issue of *Chicago Lawyer* has no story on the transition report.

—Ron Dorfman