

Kusper Bars Press from Voter Files

BY PAMELA ZEKMAN

Stanley T. Kusper Jr., chairman of the Chicago Election Board, who previously declared that his office records always are open to press and public scrutiny, shut the door yesterday on reporters' requests to examine office documents.

It was his first face-to-face confrontation with William Mullen, Tribune Task Force reporter, who worked undercover in Kusper's office for three months obtaining evidence used in an investigation of voting irregularities in the March primary.

"Hello, Mr. Mullen," Kusper said in a rather surprised greeting.

Asks About Father

"How is your father?" he asked with a smile. He was referring to the ruse used by Mullen when he departed from the board's employment as a \$20-a-day office clerk, saying his father had fallen ill.

Board employees lingered at the door of Kusper's private office gawking at the confrontation between their boss and two reporters who explained they were there to pick up public information they previously had been promised.

Letter to Tribune

In a letter, Aug. 2, to the editor of The Tribune after Kusper's discovery of Mullen's true identity, Kusper said:

"It is my opinion, and I have continually so conducted myself, that reasonable access to material information or documentation, except as to that specifically excluded by law, is available to members of the press and the communications media in the proper exercise of their professional responsibilities to the public."

He described himself in the letter as a "staunch supporter" of the constitutional right of freedom of the press, and asserted it was unnecessary to

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work under cover in his office to obtain information.

"The public has the right to know, and in this I fully concur," he wrote.

Yesterday, he was telling a different story.

He referred to detailed disclosures of vote fraud running in The Tribune since Sunday, and said he was being "bludgeoned from behind."

Promised Tally Sheets

The reporters went to the office after they were promised lists of election judges and tally sheets for the 7th and 2d Wards, and asked to also examine ballot applications in a precinct reportedly containing voter forgeries.

"Those records are being used by this office now to prepare a response to charges in your articles," Kusper said. The requested information concerned precincts which

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have not been mentioned in the articles.

"After our office has completed its investigation, you may have them, but only those things that are of public record," the reporters were told.

Kusper repeated his refrain that he would answer no questions until he holds a press conference - in response to charges in *The Tribune*.

He ignored evidence printed in the newspaper that his office repeatedly had violated its own rules in appointing election judges, and passed over evidence of fraud contained in its own files.

Declares His Innocence

He declared he and his staff were innocent of wrongdoing because the board has no responsibility for what happens during elections at the precinct level. He refused to say who is responsible.

The interview began and ended in front of a mystified visitor who had been complaining of his difficulties in searching thru files of 61 precincts for needed information.

"Take Mr. Mullen with you," Kusper said, looking up at the visitor. "He's better at finding things in this office than we are."