

A Pervasive Aura Of the Fat Payoff

By Marquis Childs

WHILE the oligarchs of the Senate would like to wrap them under the cover of a lengthy investigation, ending eventually in the file-and-forget category, the charges against Sen. Thomas J. Dodd have stirred so much concern that they can hardly be brushed off. There is a growing feeling that the reputation of the Senate itself is at stake. Yet when all is said and done, the most to come out of the tempest stirred by Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson is likely to be a motion to censure the Senator from Connecticut for his happy faculty of inspiring showers of gifts.

The FBI—Dodd was once an FBI agent and is a favorite of J. Edgar Hoover—has found that employees whom Dodd had dismissed, and yet kept temporarily in his office, photo-copied more than 4000 documents out of the Dodd files. They did this on week ends with a photo-copy machine in the Senator's office.

They still had official access to these documents. They did not remove the documents from the office but returned them to the files. Therefore, despite pressure from Dodd for criminal action, it is questionable whether any crime was committed.

Conceivably Dodd might be prosecuted for Federal income tax evasion. Diners ostensibly to raise campaign funds produced more than \$100,000 on which he paid no tax. His office claims that the diners meant their contributions to be gifts to the Senator in a fine American tradition and, therefore, they were not taxable.

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue, which would have to recommend prosecution to the Department of Justice, was burned in a similar case last year and is hardly likely to take another chance. After lengthy legal preparation by the Internal Revenue Service, William G. (Billy the Kid) Stratton, former Governor of Illinois, was charged with evading nearly \$41,000 in taxes on allegedly unreported income of \$83,000 during 1957-60, the last four years of his two terms as governor.

In the 10-week trial things looked bad for Stratton until a Lochinvar—from the East this time—came riding to the rescue. Sen. Everett McKinley Dirksen, a native son, leader of the Republican minority in the Senate, was the last witness put on by the defense. Among admirers of the Dirksen virtuoso performance are those who insist that this is the prize example of his mastery of the style of gentle obfuscation.

It ran the gamut from tears to laugh-

ter and back again. Did Stratton spend alleged campaign funds for expensive clothes, a houseboat, a private home during the years he occupied the executive mansion? Did Mrs. Stratton, in the IRS reconstruction of the free-spending political life, invest generously in the arts of adornment?

This was all, the Senator testified, to the costly end of maintaining an imposing political presence. The judge asked Dirksen if he himself had ever deducted clothes as a political expense, and he drew from the witness a reply that will long survive as a piece of political folklore: "Not to be offensive, I came so close to it once. It was my first White House party and I had no long tails and no white tie. I was beside myself. I didn't know what to do. I finally went to the White House in a rented suit. As a result, my constituents collected \$2700. But I told them to divide it among the Salvation Army, Red Cross and others. At long last I did not deduct from my income tax, although I could have felt justified in doing so because of embarrassment I went through. It was a matter of judgment."

THE SENATOR paid the tenderest tribute to his wife, whom he described as "the most important unsalaried person on my staff." To sum it up for the jury of six men and six women, he said: "In the very broadest sense, in carrying out my political responsibilities, I have never found a substitute for money."

Stratton was acquitted. Mrs. Stratton shouted for joy, and the former governor said he had no malice in his heart for anyone.

This is the week that his fellow Republicans in Illinois are paying tribute to Dirksen for his "40 years of service." The celebration includes the presentation of a bust to the Lincoln Museum in Springfield and is to be climaxed by a fund-raising dinner in Chicago for statewide candidates.

This is the pattern. Lobbyists and favor-seekers are conspicuous among those who buy the \$100 tickets. But abuses have become so notorious that earnest men such as Sen. John J. Williams, a Delaware Republican, are determined that reforms must come out of the Dodd disclosures. They are saying that the aura of payoff is too pervasive to ignore.

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