

Post 5/31/66

# The Washin

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## Testimonial Dinner Jungle

No doubt there is good reason for the Senate Committee on Standards and Conduct to begin its investigation of Senator Dodd by inquiring into his relations with Julius Klein, a registered foreign agent. But we hope that this decision will not divert the Committee from its larger task of exploring the testimonial dinner jungle. This is the area in which public interest is most acute and in which the need for legislation is especially urgent.

Sen. Eugene McCarthy, a member of the investigating committee, is opposing any senatorial judgment on whether Senator Dodd transferred campaign contributions to his personal use. This, he said, would involve judging the conduct of a Senator "by standards which have never been defined." There is indeed much controversy as to what these standards are and as to whether Senator Dodd flouted them. With the Senate now launched upon an investigation, however, it acquires a special obligation to light up this murky area.

The fact is that the testimonial dinner has become, as Richard Harwood has noted in his articles in this newspaper, a widely-accepted method by which Congressmen raise money for many different purposes. Usually these dinners have the flavor of campaign money about them; but actually the cash may be used for past or future campaign expenses, for trips to the home state, for office expenses or many other purposes. If Senator McCarthy is right in saying in effect that there is no clear distinction between campaign funds and other gifts to members of Congress, it is a serious indictment of Congress for failure to legislate on a vital subject.

The very least Congress should do, in our opin-

ion, is to require that all campaign funds contributed and received as such should be spent for campaign purposes or turned over to a political committee. Strict accounting for such funds and for their expenditure, with full public disclosure of the records, is another essential. The solicitation of funds through testimonial dinners for the personal use of a legislator or for special expenses he may incur should be flatly forbidden.

How absurd it is for Congress to make it a crime for one of its members to accept a "political" contribution from Federal employes and yet leave the door open to "gifts" from these groups! The gift is substantially more objectionable than the forbidden campaign contribution. It is beside the point for Congressmen to say that they have heavy expenses and that the official allowances are too small to permit adequate performance of their jobs. They are legislators who can vote themselves larger allowances if necessary. Indeed, congressional salaries and expense money have been substantially increased in recent years.

The ugly fact is that Congressmen do not vote themselves more money because they want the appearance of being moderate in their expenditures. But seemingly some of them then want to raise their standard of living, or standard of operating, by quietly taking gifts—many of these from people who have an ax to grind. This is not only an unethical practice but also an extremely dangerous one. Public business should be financed by the Government, and no legislator should be taking private gifts for his own use.

Now that the issue of testimonial dinners to finance senatorial activities has been very pointedly raised the Senate cannot afford to ignore it. This investigation ought to point up the need for legislation on the subject regardless of how Senator Dodd may stand in relation to the riddled standards that have broken down.