

Judge Bars Press From Dodd Quiz

By Paul W. Valentine
Washington Post Staff Writer

A Federal judge yesterday ordered the press excluded from pre-trial question-and-answer sessions conducted by opposing lawyers in Connecticut Senator Thomas J. Dodd's \$5 million libel suit against columnists Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson.

Citing possible injury to witnesses in cases of public interest, Judge Alexander Holtzoff granted a motion by Dodd's attorney, John F. Sonnett, to close the deposition sessions to the general public.

Sonnett accused Pearson and Anderson of "trying to case by newspaper," a reference to intermittent commentary in the daily column on progress of the suit.

Offers Conference Room.

Sonnett added that depositions are normally taken in the crowded confines of lawyers' offices and there would not be room for the press. Anderson's attorney, Warren Woods, offered his law firm's "rather large conference

room" for the occasion.

"I don't see how the case would be enhanced by a large public attendance," interrupted Holtzoff, ending the discussion.

Dodd filed his conspiracy and libel suit against the two columnists following a series of their articles earlier this year charging the 57-year-old Senator with helping businessmen get government contracts and siphoning off political campaign money for his own use.

Each side in the dispute is now seeking depositions, that is, sworn testimony from the other side for preparation of a possible civil trial on the libel and conspiracy issues.

Alternating Depositions

Each wants first crack at the other, but Holtzoff ruled yesterday that Dodd's side will initiate the process, with the attorneys working out a schedule of alternating depositions thereafter.

Pearson and Anderson originally asked to take Dodd's deposition Monday, but that is now postponed indefinitely.

Woods and Pearson's attorney, John Donovan, also asked Dodd to bring hundreds of documents with him for his deposition. Sonnett agreed some were pertinent to the libel and conspiracy issues but asked that others be excluded. The exclusions and inclusions will be ironed out later.