

## The Washington Merry-Go-Round

## Dodd's Suit Aims to End Disclosures

By Drew Pearson

Art Buchwald, my non-serious colleague, came out to the farm the other day for lunch. Nosing around the place, he remarked:

"I'm here for Sen. Dodd to see if the place is worth \$5 million."

"Of course Sen. Dodd has been damaged," remarked Mrs. P. "He won't be able to hold those \$100-a-plate dinners any more and put the proceeds in his own pocket."

All kidding aside, there are some important aspects to libel suits brought or threatened for the purpose of stopping public discussion.

John F. Sonnett, attorney for Dodd, let one aspect out of the bag when he appeared before Judge Alexander Holtzoff over the weekend, when courts normally are not in session and with only one side being heard, in Dodd's recent \$5-million suit. Very frankly Sonnett stated "the vendetta will not voluntarily stop" unless "immediate steps" are taken.

In other words, a primary purpose of Dodd's libel action was to shut off further revelations regarding Dodd.

## New Libel Threat

Simultaneously, in San Francisco, the Christopher Farms Dairy sent telegrams to all of our California newspa-



Pearson

pers warning against publication of my columns regarding the convictions of George Christopher for watering milk and taking farmer kickbacks. Christopher is now running for Governor of California.

The telegrams were signed by James C. Purcell on behalf of Christopher Dairy Farms, a "corporation." The telegrams emphasized three times that this "corporation" might be damaged, implying that a corporation could scare editors more than an individual.

It did scare some California editors into suppressing the column. It also scared radio station KFBK in Sacramento, owned by the McClatchy newspapers, into suppressing part of a radio broadcast.

However, the Christopher Farms Corporation is owned by the man who aspires to the highest office in California, which rates with New York as a stepping-stone to the Presidency; so it would seem fair that the voters know the full record of such an important candidate whether he hides behind a "corporation" or not.

## Pleas on Record

The record consisted of criminal pleas entered in the court records and the inspection books of the California Health Department. These are privileged documents, open to public inspection. However, the average voter hasn't the time to go up to Marin County or San Francisco to look at the records, so he has to rely on the press to inform him.

The press, of course is protected by the First Amend-

ment of the Constitution in performing this duty and more recently by the Supreme Court's decision in New York Times vs. Sullivan that public officials are definitely subject to criticism without newspapers being subjected to the expense of jury trials; though I confess that some U.S. district judges have been very slow about reading and following the Supreme Court's opinion.

In any event, regardless of the Dodd libel suit or other threats of suits, this column will continue to do its best to report the facts regarding public officials or would-be public officials who have had conflicts of interest. Sen. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, and former Mayor Christopher, Republican of California, both fall in this category.