

# Sen. Cook Tied to Ashland Oil Firm

By Jack Anderson

Sen. Marlow W. Cook (R-Ky.) is known in the backrooms of Congress as the senator from Ashland Oil.

The bluff, burly Cook champions Ashland's interests on the Senate floor and accepts special favors, in return, from the oil company. The relationship between Cook and the company is so cozy, according to Senate sources, that Ashland has sent ready-made speeches to Capitol Hill for the senator to deliver.

Cook, in turn, has used the company's jet as a commuter plane to wing back and forth between Washington and his Kentucky constituency. Just three weeks ago, a Cook aide hopped the Ashland shuttle to attend the funeral of a prominent Kentucky Republican.

An Ashland vice president, Clyde Webb, also has the run of the senator's office. His daughter, Betty, is on the senator's payroll. A handsome, hand-carved goose over the senator's chair was a gift from Webb.

The oil executive is also a familiar figure around Cook's winter home outside Sarasota, Fla. In fact, Webb used to dock his small fishing boat at Cook's place, where the senator used it as his own.

The omnipresent Webb also turned up among the high muck-a-mucks at the 1973 presidential inauguration. The inaugural photo shows Webb's face peering solemnly from behind Presi-

dent Nixon and Chief Justice Warren E. Burger.

This historic seat was arranged for Webb, of course, by the obliging Cook, who happened to be co-chairman of the inaugural committee.

Cook, with his silver thatch and solid bulk, has become a formidable figure in the Senate. Able and articulate, he has a reputation as an operator in the backrooms and a brawler in open debate.

His political hero was the late Sen. Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.), who had the shaggy appearance of an affectionate St. Bernard. He won the uncontested title of Wizard of Ooze by being able to talk his way out of the most flagrant inconsistencies.

Cook is also capable of evoking a certain soulful appeal, and he can turn on the ooze. One of his favorite sayings, moreover, is that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

But in the terms of Senate husbandry, Cook is less the affable St. Bernard than the temperamental prize bull. He is easily aroused and can become a one-man stampede.

It is the political custom of Kentucky voters to choose one senator from the hinterlands, the other from the urban centers. Cook is the urban senator, a Louisville lawyer, who was just about everybody's "Man of the Year" in Kentucky before he was elected to the Senate and became Ashland's man in Washington.

My associate, Jack Cloherty, spent a month establishing the links between Ashland and the senator, an investigation which took Cloherty from Capitol Hill to Kentucky.

The likeable Cook, of course, had an explanation for everything. He acknowledged that he has accepted speech material from Ashland but denied that it came in the form of ready-made speeches. He used several sources, he said, in the preparation of his speeches.

But insiders, whose reliability has been tested, reported to us that an Ashland emissary has delivered prepared and polished speeches to Cook's staff man on the Senate Rules Committee, Joe O'Leary.

The cautious O'Leary said he couldn't recall this happening, although he admitted working with Ashland in drafting Cook's energy speeches. He sought research from other industry sources as well, he said.

He contended that Cook was not "Ashland's man" and cited an issue on which the senator and Ashland disagreed. The record shows, however, that Cook has consistently fought for more incentives for the oil industry and has repeatedly gone to bat for Ashland. When the Canadian government threatened to cut off the crude oil supply to an Ashland refinery, for example, Cook raised an uproar.

The senator argued that Ashland, a power in Kentucky, was

a constituent and, therefore, was entitled to his senatorial services. But no other constituent, except possibly the tobacco companies, get such devoted service from Cook.

He claimed at first that he had taken only "three or four" free flights in Ashland's plane. When we cited our evidence, however, he breezily acknowledged that he may have taken 20 to 25 free flights. Indeed, this is a low estimate, although his use of the Ashland jet has waned in the last year. He not only commuted to Kentucky on the oil company's plane but used it to ferry his entourage to the Kentucky Derby each year.

Cook has also collected at least \$10,950 in campaign contributions from Ashland executives, including \$1,000 from company president Orin Atkins and \$500 apiece from Webb and his wife. Cook pointed out that Atkins, at least, gave a matching \$1,000 to his Democratic Senate opponent, Gov. Wendell H. Ford.

Cook's benevolence toward the oil industry has not gone unrecognized, for that matter, by the Texas oil barons. He has taken in at least \$7,750 in out-of-state oil money.

There is no doubt that Ashland Oil has sought out and systematically courted Cook. The situation is an ominous reminder of the days when the robber barons controlled the Senate.