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More on Milk and Money

Last October, even before the final figures had been toted up, Time magazine took a look at this country's campaign financing methods and termed them a "national disgrace." Now that the astronomical total of about \$400 million for all of the campaigns waged across the country this fall has been added up and as the revelations come dribbling out from a variety of legal actions which have been brought to enforce the campaign spending law, we can expect the cries of righteousness to be mixed with quiet efforts to gut that law. If anything re-inforces the conviction that the law needs strengthening rather than gutting, it is the latest information seeping out of the Nader organization's lawsuit to roll back the price support increase awarded to the dairy industry by the Nixon administration in March, 1971.

The first outlines of that affair became public last August. On March 13, 1971, the Secretary of Agriculture announced that there would be no increase in the milk price support of \$4.66 per hundredweight. On March 22 the political arm of one of the milk producers' associations gave \$10,000 to a number of Republican fund-raising committees. On March 23, a group of dairymen met with the President in the Cabinet Room of the White House. On March 25, the Department of Agriculture reversed itself and raised the support figure to \$4.93 per hundredweight—an action which one dairy industry spokesman estimated would add \$500,000 to \$700,000 to dairy farmers' paychecks.

That same spokesman, William A. Powell, president of Mid-America Dairymen, wrote a member of his organization, "I have become increasingly aware that the sincere and soft voice of the dairy farmer is no match for the jingle of hard currencies put in the campaign funds of the politicians by the vegetable fat interests, labor, oil, steel, airlines and others." By August, 1972, dairymen's contributions to the Nixon campaign funds had mounted to more than \$300,000. Asked about August, 1972, contributions, one industry spokesman replied candidly, "It's not unusual to bleed you more later."

The latest Nader suit revelations show not only how

right he was, but also how much the campaign financing law needs strengthening. Pre-trial testimony by officials of two dairy organizations disclosed that during the last 10 days of the campaign, their organizations gave a total of \$45,000 to the Nixon campaign which was not disclosed before the election. The law provides that a donation of less than \$5,000 made during the last 12 days of the campaign need not be reported during that time. Those undisclosed contributions brought the dairy industry's known contributions up to \$417,500.

The pre-trial testimony also sheds light on the relationship of the administration and the dairy industry at about the time the price support increase was made. The initial contributions were funneled through Harrison and Reeves, a law firm in which Murray Chotiner, a long-time associate of President Nixon's, is a partner. The contributions were made to committees designated by either Chotiner or his law partner, Marion E. Harrison. The pre-trial testimony reveals that just before their March 23, 1971, meeting with the President, the dairymen gathered in Mr. Harrison's law office and that Mr. Harrison then escorted them down the street to the White House to meet with the President.

Now none of this *proves* that there was a connection between the campaign contributions of the dairymen and the decision to raise the milk price support, but there is no doubt that the jingle of the dairymen's hard currency was heard throughout the land and that the dairymen, if not bled later, were certainly there chipping in right up to the very end. Mr. Zeigler's denial issued from San Clemente last August that there was any connection may be right, but the appearances aren't good. And it is the appearances that have such a debilitating effect on the people's faith in their government. In his State of the Union message in 1971 Mr. Nixon said, "Most Americans today are simply fed up with government at all levels." The government's and the politicians' approach to campaign financing is one reason why.