

JUL 29 1971

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JULY 29, 1971

Former Coast Newsmen Sentenced for Contempt

Special to The New York Times

LOS ANGELES, July 28—A press secretary was sentenced to jail today for refusing to answer a judge's questions about his actions when he worked as a newspaper reporter.

Judge Charles H. Older of Superior Court ordered William Farr to remain in prison for contempt of court until he is willing to answer 13 questions. The judge also said that further court action would proceed to see if Mr. Farr is guilty of a separate contempt-of-court charge for obtaining and publishing information for an article he wrote during the Charles M. Manson trial, when he knew that a ban on publicity had been ordered.

Mr. Farr was found in contempt by Judge Older last week for actions arising from his former role as a reporter for The Los Angeles Herald-Examiner. Since March 1 he has been press secretary to the Los Angeles District Attorney, Joseph P. Busch Jr.

California has a statute that protects reporters who refuse to identify their sources, but Judge Older held that Mr. Farr could no longer claim this

protection since he was no longer a reporter.

The history of the case as well as comments of persons involved in it make clear that Mr. Farr was caught between Judge Older and the attorneys who appeared before the judge in the trial of Charles M. Manson and three members of his "family"—Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslie Van Housen.

All four were convicted of the murders of Sharon Tate, the actress, and four other persons at her home, as well as two other persons in a separate incident.

Dispute Over Testimony

During the trial, over which Judge Older presided, the prosecution sought to present testimony of Virginia Graham, who had been a cellmate of Miss Atkins. Miss Graham never testified to the jury, but her account of Miss Atkins's statements in jail was made available to all the attorneys. Judge Older had ordered them all not to discuss evidence outside the courtroom.

On Oct. 9, Mr. Farr wrote an account for the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner saying that Miss Graham was prepared to tell the jury that the Manson "family" had planned the tor-

ture murder of other well known entertainers.

The account named Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Tom Jones and Steve McQueen as the intended victims.

Judge Older asked Mr. Farr at that time to name his source for the article, but Mr. Farr said he would not. The California statute protected his right to protect his sources, Mr. Farr told the judge.

Switch After Job Shift

Judge Older did not press the matter then, but after Mr. Farr became District Attorney Busch's press secretary the judge opened it again. Mr. Farr still resisted questions about his sources.

On June 30 Judge Older brought before him six lawyers who were in the case when the Farr story was printed. Each said that he had not given the Graham statement to the reporter.

Mr. Farr was questioned on July 19. He told Judge Older that he had obtained three transcripts of Miss Graham's statement. He got two from members of the group of lawyers who appeared before the judge on June 30, Mr. Farr said, but he would not identify

them. He got a third from someone else, he said, and would not identify that person either.

Mr. Farr was asked specifically about each of the six lawyers and each time refused to answer whether that man was one of his secret sources. At the end of the session Judge Older held that Mr. Farr had committed 17 acts of contempt.

The case has not aroused great interest in the California press.

Lawyers for Sigma Delta Chi, the professional journalism fraternity, and the American Newspaper Guild appeared in Mr. Farr's behalf, as well as counsel for his former employer, The Herald Examiner.

The Los Angeles Times made this comment in an editorial last week: "California law protects the right of editors and reporters to keep confidential their news sources, but since Farr is no longer a news reporter, Older concludes he no longer is shielded by the law, a rationale so light and fluffy that we, in turn, conclude that it will dry up and blow away on appeal."