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Freedom for Farr --And the Press

THE LOS ANGELES REPORTER who has spent 45 days in the Los Angeles county jail defending the right of the readers of his, and every other, newspaper to know what goes on in this country without the by-your-leave of any judge on any bench, was set free yesterday. A stroke of Justice William O. Douglas' pen liberated this extraordinarily conscientious man, William T. Farr, from an unlimited sentence to jail for contempt of court.

We congratulate Reporter Farr for sticking it out in loyalty to his principles. He has been in jail for the longest time any American reporter has been imprisoned for refusing to reveal the sources of a news story. And we express our gratitude that Justice Douglas found it, as he wrote, "in the interest of justice" to set Mr. Farr at liberty on his own recognizance while the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals here considers his appeal from the order of the Los Angeles superior judge who consigned him to jail last November 27.

FARR'S CASE AROSE out of a complicated situation in the murder trial of the infamous Charles Manson. As a reporter then employed by the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, Farr printed a story reporting the statement of a prospective witness to the effect that the Manson "family" had planned to murder several other movie stars in addition to Sharon Tate. The judge, Charles H. Older, had warned lawyers and other participants in the trial not to disclose any information about the case. He demanded that Farr divulge the name of whoever supplied him with the statement. Farr refused, and after the exhaustion of long appeals, he was cast into solitary confinement.

There he languished with no prospect of release until he should submit to the judge's insistence that he breach a confidence which, as a newsman, he believed himself entitled to extend to his sources. What burdened him most, he said yesterday on his liberation, was the uncertainty of how

long he was to be in jail — "even the rest of my life." This was no emotional exaggeration. Justice Douglas wrote in his order:

"WHETHER THIS MEANS that Farr could be imprisoned for life is not clear. The issue is not free from doubt. Yet since the precise question is a new one not covered by our prior decisions, I have concluded in the interest of justice to release Farr."

The Los Angeles Times, now Farr's employer, said when its reporter went to jail that the First Amendment was his cellmate and that "Judge Charles H. Older of the Superior Court of Los Angeles put them both there." We think it is profoundly true that the freedom of the press is involved in Farr's stout refusal to yield to an order, backed by an indeterminate sentence, to divulge his news source. It is this ruthless court process that is truly contemptible.