

3 Assessment Suits Filed for Marcello

By CHARLES ZEWE

Attorneys for jailed rackets figure Carlos Marcello have filed three suits against Jefferson Parish Assessor Lawrence A. Chehardy seeking to knock down 1970 assessments on three Marcello-owned properties.

Suits were filed yesterday in the 24th Judicial District Court in Gretna by Cecil M. Burglass Jr., a Marcello attorney, asking assessments on Bayou Verrett Lands Co., Churchill Farms Inc. and Marshlands Investment Co. be declared "null and void."

The suits contend the swampland properties, which had their assessments set by the Louisiana Tax Commission in 1969, were out of line with similar properties in the parish. The suits said they should be thrown out because Chehardy has failed to equalize Jefferson property assessments fairly.

THE SUITS are almost identical to one on appeal to the State Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals seeking to overturn the 1969 assessments on Churchill Farms alone.

Marcello currently is confined to the Federal Medical Center at Springfield, Mo., serving a six-month jail sentence for attempting to punch an FBI agent.

Assessments on the three properties were raised by more than \$400,000 under tax commission orders last year. Attorneys say that figure represents a 2,500 times increase in the assessments and is the highest assessment rate for marshlands in the state.

JEFFERSON TAX bills for 1970 are in the process of being mailed out by the assessor's office. The suits ask the court to block payment of the taxes.

Assessments on Bayou Verrett Lands were raised from \$13,000 to \$83,000. Churchill Farms was upped from \$8,800 to \$203,388 and Marshlands Investment Co. was raised from \$3,550 to \$90,000.

The 4,000-acre Churchill Farms tract has been at the center of allegations by Life magazine that influence was exerted on state officials to drain the predominantly marsh-bound land south of Westwego.

MARCELLO HAS denied under oath any favoritism from state government for the property.

Lands owned by Marcello-connected companies also have been involved in controversies over location of two proposed West Bank highways—the Dixie Freeway and Lapalco Boulevard. Sections of the highways are planned to cut through Marcello's land and this fact has sparked wide criticism by state and parish officials.

The suits accuse Chehardy of "arbitrary" assessment of the three properties.

THE RIGHT OF the tax commission to hike assessments on Churchill Farms was affirmed by the 24th Judicial District Court earlier, prompting the appeal of the Fourth Circuit.

No hearing date has been set on the three suits. Burglass said a decision probably will be delayed until the Fourth Circuit rules on the appeal, which it is scheduled to hear Nov. 24.

The appeal will be heard the same day a three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has scheduled to hear arguments in Tampa on motions by Marcello attorneys asking for a new trial on the 1968 assault conviction.