

Co-op Man Links Suit To Election

From News Dispatches

CHICAGO—An official of the nation's largest dairy farmer cooperative says he believes there was a link in the timing of a Justice Department antitrust suit against the cooperative and its refusal to contribute more money to President Nixon's re-election campaign.

The Chicago Tribune has quoted George E. Mehren, general manager of Associated Milk Producers, Inc., as telling a Tribune reporter, "I'm making no direct allegations, but I'm saying it's a sequence of activities that are most unusual and depressing . . . They are intertwined."

Mehren charged that "the entire law suit procedure, particularly in the context of the campaign fund refusal, was highly suspicious and perhaps even represents political activity entering the courts."

Mehren said he was confronted with the proposed suit on a Friday and was given only until the following Monday to sign a consent decree agreeing to certain conditions regulating AMPI activities or face filing of the suit. He opted to face the suit.

"The fact that the lawsuit itself was prepared so speedily and with no investigations by the Justice Department indicated the complaint was drawn with collaboration with private litigators who had legal actions pending against AMPI," Mehren said.

Mehren said the request for a contribution was made two days after the suit was filed Feb. 3, 1972.

The Justice Department suit was followed by 13 others, some of which were filed by privately owned dairy companies. All of the suits have been consolidated into one suit which will be heard in U.S. District Court in Kansas City.

Mehren said the request for the money was made by Herbert Kalmbach, formerly the President's personal attorney. An association source said Kalmbach asked for about \$750,000.

Mehren raised the subject of the contributions in a speech at the annual midstates regional meeting of AMPI and then elaborated in a later interview with the Tribune. He said Kalmbach made the request for the money at a meeting in Mehren's Los Angeles office and "neither threatened nor offered goodies."

Mehren has been the AMP's general manager since January, 1972. He had been an assistant secretary of agriculture in the Johnson and Kennedy administrations.