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Dodd's Odd Reaction To Kennedy's Death



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Today's column is by Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson

SOME PEOPLE have asked why the staff of Senator Tom Dodd. (Dem.-Conn.) left him after having served him for some years.

There were several reasons, but one of them involved a bizarre chapter in the aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination which William Manchester missed. It involved the reaction that day of Dodd, who, though a fellow Catholic, a fellow Democrat, and a fellow New Englander, did not mourn President Kennedy's death.

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DODD WAS in Hartford when the news of the assassination reached him. An hour or two later one of Dodd's staff members in Washington, Michael O'Hare, received a phone call from Ruth Weldon, secretary to Joe Barr, Washington representative of United Aircraft, stating that the new President, Lyndon Johnson, had summoned Dodd to Washington; therefore, United Aircraft, because of the importance of the occasion, was placing a special plane at the senator's disposal.

The news sounded strange, inasmuch as any call from the White House to Dodd would go through his Senate office and no such call had been received.

However, Ed Sullivan, Dodd's political secretary in Hartford, telephoned to say that the senator wanted James Boyd, his administrative assistant, Marjorie Carpenter and O'Hare of his staff to come to the airport to meet him.

When the plane arrived, Dodd was obviously under the influence of liquor.

He pointed to the grave errors of the Kennedy Administration and compared them to the reign of Pope John. Dodd said that both men had been in office a short time, but they had made so many errors that it would take 50 years to correct them.

Dodd talked about the fact that the new Johnson Administration would be very friendly to him; and he asked Boyd to ascertain the procedure for selecting a new vice president. Does the Congress pick him or can the President pick him? He seemed to think he might be the man to be picked.

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THEN THE Senator began singing. He seemed jubilant over the death of the President. Upon arrival at his home, the senator went upstairs with his staff to watch television. A Canadian spokesman appeared on the screen to express the condolences of Canada to the American people. Dodd didn't like what he said.

He turned the dial to try to find something that didn't pertain to the assassination, but all he could get was organ music. Dodd stood in front of the TV set, waving his arms, conducting the organ music and chortling.

Dodd's staff was dismayed. It was a factor which contributed to their conviction that they were working for the wrong man.

Note—Dodd never did hear from President Johnson. Obviously the alleged summons to Washington was a figment of his imagination.