

Received 8/14/69

page 4/ NOLA Express

HOFFA, PARTIN, &

by Tom Bethell

On May 1 this year, an editorial cartoon in the States-Item depicted Governor John McKeithen carrying luggage labelled 'Edward Grady Partin' out of the Baton Rouge Teamsters Local 5 door. On the door is written CONTROVERSY SPECIALISTS.

McKEITHEN

In the headline story the previous day, however, the newspaper did not explain what the controversy was. Partin apparently owned an interest in a speedway track near Baton Rouge, and when he heard that Partin was apparently "ready to quit the area" if it could be sold, McKeithen announced that he was "very much interested" in helping him sell it. But why should the Governor of a state be so anxious to expedite the departure of a teamster official? The States-Item did not say.

The name Edward Grady Partin has cropped up many times in the local papers over the last two years, but the precise nature of the "controversy" surrounding him has never been clearly explained. The Partin story has been reported confusingly, and even evasively, by the Times-Picayune and the States-Item. Upon examination, it turns out to be a story of corruption at the highest levels of state government, and perhaps that explains the hazy and confused coverage it has received locally.

HOFFA CONVICTED

The story began in October 1962, when James R. Hoffa, then president of the Teamsters union, was brought to trial in Nashville, Tennessee, for violation of the Taft-Hartley labor law. He was accused of receiving \$242,000 illegally from a Detroit trucking firm. During the trial Walter Sheridan, then the chief investigator for Robert F. Kennedy's "Hoffa unit", received a telephone call from an informant close to Hoffa. The informant, who was given the code name 'Andy', relayed to Sheridan conversations between Hoffa and Ewing King, president of the Nashville Teamsters. 'Andy' said that Hoffa had slapped his back pocket and boasted that he planned to "get one juror, or try to get a few scattered jurors and take his chances." 'Andy' later reported to Sheridan that Hoffa had said in his presence he "would pay \$15,000 or \$20,000 whatever it cost to get to the jury."

The trial ended in a mistrial, the jury deadlocked 7-5 for acquittal, but in May 1963, the federal grand jury returned a jury tampering indictment against Hoffa and

six others. On Feb 4, 1964 Andy testified against Hoffa in Chattanooga. He turned out to be Edward Grady Partin, a close Hoffa associate who had driven to the courthouse every day with Hoffa during the Nashville trial. Hoffa was convicted - for the first time - in his jury tampering trial and sentenced to eight years in jail.

Six weeks later Hoffa was brought to trial again, this time in Chicago, to face fraud charges in the handling of more than \$20 million of Teamsters funds. Hoffa was again convicted, receiving this time a five year sentence. One of six co-defendants convicted with Hoffa was Zachary A. Strate, who had obtained union pension fund loans in connection with contracting operations in New Orleans. Strate was the contractor who built the Fountainbleau Motor Hotel.

Before he finally landed in the federal penitentiary in March 1967, attempts were made on Hoffa's behalf to subvert politicians who might be able to help him stay out of jail. For example, Senator Edward V. Long, then chairman of the Senate Committee on Administrative Procedure and Practice, received \$48,000 from Hoffa's lawyer, Morris Shenker and proceeded to use his subcommittee to investigate the activities of those federal agencies which were pursuing Hoffa. (Long was defeated in a re-election bid last year in Missouri.) Meanwhile Edward Grady

Partin was back in Baton Rouge, where he became business agent of Teamsters Local 5.

LABOR MANAGEMENT COMMISSION FORMED

There the matter stood until July 1967, when Gov. McKeithen called for the formation of a Labor-Management Commission. The New York Times reported that: "A special session of the Louisiana legislature was called for July 17 by the governor to study his proposal for a five member board of inquiry. Thirteen corporations have halted construction of \$482 million worth of new plants along the Mississippi River. Bombings and rifle shots at automobiles have been reported. Gus Weill, aide to McKeithen, says there have been "allegations of racketeering" among segments of labor and government. Edward Grady Partin claimed he had been pressured to change his testimony against former Teamster president James R. Hoffa. Partin said that the construction shutdowns were part of a 'conspiracy' to force him to change his testimony."

The proposal to form a Labor-Management Commission had been reported a few days earlier in the Times-Picayune but the story (by C.M. Hargroder) omitted to say anything about the labor shutdown in the Baton Rouge area, and did not mention Partin's report of a bribery attempt. On July 22, 1967 the formation of the commission was reported in a long story by Hargroder in the Times-Picayune but 90% of the story was about the proposal to dredge shells from Lake Ponchartrain, an irrelevant amendment which had been tacked onto the bill in the legislature. Neither Partin, nor bribe, nor labor shutdown were mentioned in the story. Thus, while New York Times readers were reading about dynamitings in Baton Rouge, and allegations of attempts to bribe the chief witness against Hoffa, Times-Picayune readers were confined to a headline story entitled 'Anti Rackets Bill Passes Smoothly' which turned out to be a story about sea shells. This is the kind of thing which has made the story difficult to follow in the local papers.

PARTIN PRESSURED

About a month later evidence began to accumulate that the story about being pressured to change his Hoffa testimony was not just something Partin had made up. At a federal court in Chicago, Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara, one of the eight criminal judges in New Orleans, (now ten) testified that he had met with Partin in February in the office of James H. Gill, (an administrative assistant of Senator Russell Long.) Judge O'Hara admitted under oath that he

had tried to get Partin to sign an affidavit stating that wiretapping evidence had been used against Hoffa. Partin had refused to sign it. O'Hara testified that he had contacted Partin at the request of Zachary Strate, who had been convicted at the same time as Hoffa. O'Hara also admitted he had been the expense paid travelling companion of Strate at a time when he was supposedly absent from the bench with "ear trouble". Zachary Strate also testified at the Chicago hearing, and added that he and Judge O'Hara had travelled together to Las Vegas and Washington D.C. While in the capital they had visited the new Teamster boss, James Fitzsimmons, in his office. "Generally, when we travel together I pay the bills," Strate allowed. Strate also testified that Judge O'Hara had tried to get Partin to sign an affidavit which would have undermined the Hoffa conviction.

In the wake of the O'Hara -Strate disclosures, the Metropolitan Crime Commission in New Orleans called for O'Hara's resignation from the bench. The way this story was handled by the Times-Picayune is worth noting. First came the Crime Commission request for the resignation, which was followed by a lengthy, blistering attack on Aaron Kohn, the Crime Commission's mana-

ging director, which O'Hara had written by way of a reply to the charges against him. He called Kohn a "professional muck-raker, charlatan and a genius at spewing forth a great volume of half truths." The Picayune then followed up this release by saying that "O'Hara reportedly testified that for about sixteen months he had been a very intimate friend of Zachary A. Strate. (underlining mine)

The story left the impression that O'Hara may not really have so testified, and that Aaron Kohn is a trouble-maker. In fact, it was the judge who had been travelling about with a convicted felon, and apparently trying to help Hoffa get out of jail, and for Kohn to ask for the resignation of such a judge seems only reasonable. Nevertheless O'Hara still sits on the bench. McKeithen said he had no power to remove him from office. Asked if he planned to look into the matter, McKeithen said "I will if I am asked to."

LIFE REPORTS BRIBE

Five days after the court testimony of O'Hara and Strate, LIFE magazine published the first of three articles about organized crime in Louisiana. The magazine revealed that D'Alton Smith - described as a "sometimes public relations specialist and all round operator" asked Aubrey Young, an aide and confidant of Gov. McKeithen, to set up

a meeting with Edward Grady Partin.

"D'Alton had told me that he wanted to see if he could straighten out Partin's testimony to help Hoffa," Young told LIFE. "When I saw what they were talking about in the parlor (of Young's house) I took a walk because I didn't want any part of it. After the meeting D'Alton told me that he couldn't budge Partin; that Partin said his testimony was true." Partin told LIFE that he had been offered \$25,000 a year for 10 years to change his testimony. When he refused, the offer was hiked to \$1 million. When D'Alton Smith left, Partin called up the Justice Dept. Where was the money coming from? It had been collected by Hoffa's friends - some in the union, some in the Mafia, and had been placed at Carlos Marcello's disposal to do the job.

After this article came out, Young denied that he had had any dealings with Carlos Marcello. "I have never had any dealings with him, directly or indirectly, of any kind in my life," he said. McKeithen, embarrassed by these disclosures about one of his aides, then made the following statement about Young:

"He was one of the few men I have ever known who read his bible every night and prayed unashamedly to his Lord for strength to fight that weakness with which many well-intentioned Americans are

afflicted. I am speaking, of course, of alcoholism, which Mr. Young's previous record indicated he had overcome. It was only after he had disassociated himself from the AA program and from personal prayer that his actions became such that upon learning of them, I felt he could not continue in state service."

STATE "SMEARED"

Two weeks later McKeithen said, "There's no question this state has been terribly smeared...whoever gave that story to LIFE did this state a terrible dis-service. They should be ashamed and leave the state." Actually McKeithen himself had been partly responsible for giving the story to LIFE as will be shown. A week later LIFE offered to show McKeithen further evidence of their charges. McKeithen no doubt worried about what else LIFE might have up its sleeve said, "I'm anxious to see the information they have." Asked why the magazine would want to 'smear' the state if, as the Governor said, there was no organized crime here, McKeithen started to grasp at straws. "It could be they felt Louisiana was getting too much favorable publicity lately," he

said. "They just wanted to knock a poor southern state down."

Then LIFE came out with its third article. In it they said that "Many times from June 1966 to March 1967, Carlos Marcello placed telephone calls to Aubrey Young's direct line at the governor's office in the state capitol in Baton Rouge. The calls were placed from Marcello's private office in the Town and Country Motel near New Orleans. Marcello's calls to Young in the governor's office covered the period of Young's involvement as an intermediary in the efforts to bribe Partin."

McKeithen replied to this as follows: "Aubrey Young is presently in our institution in Mandeville. He has vehemently denied to me having talked to or met with Carlos Marcello." Young may have denied it then, but he admitted it three days later. Anyway McKeithen knew that his aide Aubrey Young had been receiving calls from Marcello. When LIFE's representatives visited McKeithen in August, a few weeks before any of their articles had been published, McKeithen admitted knowledge of the phone calls, and that they had been about Edward Partin. This admission by McKeithen in fact constituted sufficient corroboration for LIFE to go ahead and print their story.

McKEITHEN RECANTS

The next day McKeithen flew to New York to confer with the editors of LIFE. On emerging from the Time-Life building, he recanted, "Just say that I am most appreciative of the information that LIFE has given us this afternoon." By the time he had returned to New Orleans, there was a brisk tone of reform to McKeithen's statements. "Gambling in this state is a thing of the past," he said, and then added, "You just sit back and watch us the next few days. We are going to clean up this state." That was in September, 67. McKeithen now admitted the phone calls, but said, "Our job is to find out what those phone calls were about, and we propose to do that," even though he already knew, as he had admitted to LIFE. Apart from this admission, the following facts are worth noting. The calls from Marcello to Young were made to Young's office in the capitol. If Marcello had been dealing with Young merely as a private citizen, he would surely have called him at home. In fact Marcello did also call Young once or twice at home.

Secondly, there were about fifty such phone calls, extending over a considerable period.

this suggest a definite liason between Marcello and the office. Finally Young's desk was less than ten feet from McKeithen's door.

During this whole period not one editorial was printed in the Times-Picayune alerting its readers to the gravity of the charges which had appeared in LIFE and even in its own columns. One editorial cartoon seemed to express impatience with the whole affair, as distracting attention from the more serious problem of "crime in the streets." The paper did not bother to staff the Hoffa hearing in Chicago at which O'Hara and Strate had testified.

In any event the investigation of the phone calls which McKeithen had promised was handled initially by the East Baton Rouge grand jury, which later returned a bribery indictment against D'Alton Smith - a charge of which he was later acquitted. The investigation was then turned over to the Labor Management Commission, which had been in existence since July. No action was taken by the commission, which, in the two years of its existence, has hardly established itself as an agressive fact-finding body.

"YOU'RE BEING USED BY THE HOFFA PEOPLE"

There is evidence that the Commission, which may have started out with the bona fide intention of investigating racketeering in labor-management relations, (27 dynamitings had occurred in the state shortly before the commission was organized) was later used as an instrument to harass Partin possibly with the motive of getting him to change his testimony against Hoffa. This at any rate is the view of Michael Epstein, a Justice Dept lawyer who was assigned to assist the US attorney in New Orleans, Louis LaCour. In March 1968 Epstein visited the home of Cecil Morgan dean of the Tulane law school and at that time chairman of the Commission. He told Morgan that "there is a strong feeling within the Dept of Justice that the Commission was set up to go after and discredit Mr. Partin thereby springing Hoffa."

Epstein told Morgan about some commission investigators playing a dual role of investigating for the commission and giving information to Hoffa. Morgan replied that he knew nothing of this, "and privately I didn't see what difference it made, so long as they were bringing the information to light." Epstein concluded the conversation by telling Morgan, "You're being used by the Hoffa people as a tool." US attorney, Louis LaCour told Morgan that the FBI would not be able to help the commission in its investigation. Later it turned out that the Justice Dept was investigating the Labor-Management Commission for possible attempts to undermine the Hoffa conviction. A federal grand jury in Nashville is currently investigating this charge.

Partin himself, who admittedly would have reason not to be objective about the matter, says that he has evidence that three investigators for the commission have bribed witnesses to give false information about him and other Local 5 members. He also says he has furnished the Justice Dept with tape recorded proof that some commission investigators were on Hoffa's payroll.

HARASSMENT

A specific instance of the kind of harassment alleged by Michael Epstein and Partin occurred when two young investigators were hired by the commission to infiltrate Partin's local. On instructions, they volunteered to work for Partin and offered to blow up some rival trucks for him. Thus it would appear that Partin's union was engaging in acts of terrorism which would discredit Partin. Partin declined the offer of "assistance" and found out who these two commission agents were by noting the license number of the car they left in. Later, these two investigators came to the conclusion that the commission was a fraud and went to work on Partin's behalf. Their information was turned over to the federal grand jury in Nashville.

Another suggestive episode occurred last December when F. Lee Bailey, the well-known criminal lawyer, showed up in Bator

Rouge and talked with some of the people involved with the commission. He said that he was acting as Hoffa's lawyer.

The latest development in this long drawn out story occurred last month, when Partin was indicted by a federal grand jury here on five counts of conspiracy and extortion. When Partin testified against Hoffa in 64, he faced federal charges of embezzlement and falsification of union records. Following his Hoffa testimony he was never prosecuted on these charges giving rise to the speculation that he was being protected by the Justice Dept. In 67 Louis LaCour filed a motion to quash the charges against Partin, on the grounds that he could no longer be prosecuted owing to disappearance of witnesses and other points.

PARTIN PROTECTED?

The motion was denied by Judge West in Baton Rouge. In his verdict he raised the question that this was merely a move to protect Partin in return for his Hoffa testimony. The new indictment of Partin stems from more recent charges that Partin and an alleged associate, Ted Dunham, have been trying to corner the concrete market in the Baton Rouge area. The question arises, therefore, why, if the Justice Dept had been protecting Partin they have now decided to prosecute him.

According to one interpretation the new Attorney General, John Mitchell, has decided to respond to pressure from certain business interests in the Baton Rouge area and has therefore moved on Partin. Clearly, however, the Partin question remains unresolved at this time, pending developments on his new indictment, and the Nashville grand jury investigation.



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