

Cases Are Piling Up on DA

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Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's office has not filed bills of information on 300 cases that have already come before the magistrate court, a check of records in the Clerk of Criminal Court showed this week.

The pileup of cases—which indirectly prompted Criminal District Court Judge Edward A. Haggerty Jr. to throw out seven cases last week—coincides with the district attorney's investigation of alleged conspiracy charges against businessman Clay L. Shaw in the months of January through March.

A closer check also reveals that in those same three months, the district attorney has had docketed with the clerk of court's office 237 cases less than a similar period in 1966, 436 less than in 1965 and 453 less than in 1964.

Criminal District Court Judge Bernard J. Bagert, who presided over the preliminary hearing requested by Garrison's office in the Shaw case, suggested that Garrison should "hire

some more people if they are that far behind."

Judge Haggerty said he called First Asst. Dist. Atty. Charles Ward last week before he let the seven prisoners go free. "It didn't come as a surprise to the district attorney's office," Judge Haggerty said Thursday. "I told Mr. Ward that I had no alternative under the law than to let the people free and he agreed with me."

Before the day was over, however, the district attorney's office had filed bills of information and the prisoners were not actually released from the Criminal Courts Building grounds.

Criminal lawyers have complained privately to reporters that there has been a recent slowdown in the wheels of justice, but none would be quoted. One said he had to deal with the district attorney and he didn't want to anger him.

Checking his jail list, Judge Bagert said, "I've got 27 still in jail. I think my docket is in good shape."

The judge pledged he would see that, excepting the most

aggravated cases, those who are now in jail "will be released on a small bond or on their own recognizance."

A breakdown of the 300 on whom no bill of information has been filed shows that 190 have made bond, but 110 are still in either the Central Lock-up or Parish Prison. Twenty-two of the 110 appeared before a presiding magistrate as far back as January and 26 went before a magistrate in February.

Judge Haggerty's action last week came about after Asst. Dist. Atty. Chris Alford, assigned to his section, asked for a continuance of the preliminary hearings. Alford blamed it on a "clerical mix-up."

It was then that Judge Haggerty called down the hall to First Asst. Ward and told him what he planned to do. The bills of information were typed by Garrison's office before the day was over.

When contacted about the situation, Ward said he would have a statement later. "I can't get one immediately," said Ward.