

JURY INDICTS 2 ATTORNEYS IN BOND CASE

T. P. 7-4-69
Masinter, Toranto Face
Corruption Charge

The Orleans Parish Grand Jury Thursday indicted two local attorneys on charges of corrupt influencing at the conclusion of one phase of an investigation into a bail bond controversy. The controversy has centered around attempts by the district attorney's office to collect forfeitures from the Maryland National Insurance Co.

The attorneys, Milton Masinter and Thomas Toranto Jr., are accused of accepting \$12,500 between Aug. 20 and Dec. 31, 1968, with the intention of influencing the conduct of then Assistant District Attorney Charles R. Ward regarding collection of the forfeitures.

Ward, who was in the court room as the jury returned the indictment to Criminal District Court Judge Bernard J. Bagert, said he received no money from the attorneys, and that the jury's action cleared him of wrongdoing.

CLEAR, SAYS WARD

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm clear," Ward said. He said that the fact that the attorneys were charged with corrupt influencing rather than bribery indicates that there was no allegation that he accepted money.

"If they had given me any money it would have been bribery," Ward explained.

Ward said, "It is a great feeling to be cleared by the Grand Jury. This Grand Jury has displayed that independent characteristic that has made the American jury system the best system of criminal justice in the world. In their hands I put my future, my reputation, and my good name, and they have not disappointed me.

"Unfortunately, there will always be a few who will remember only the investigation and not the results, and decision of the Grand Jury. But to those people who have the slightest doubt of my innocence, let me point out that Jim Garrison has always been able

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BAIL BOND CASE

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to indict anyone who either breathed, walked or talked. In spite of his best effort, in spite of all of his persuasion, this Grand Jury rejected these efforts and cleared me.

CALLED FOUNDATION

"The common man, the average citizen, the American juror, is unquestionably the foundation of criminal justice. Judges, district attorneys, and others are merely the trappings."

It was alleged that Masinter and Toranto accepted "or offered to accept" the money from Century Assurity Underwriters of Indiana with the intention of influencing Ward in two ways. One effect would be to cause Ward to withhold processing writs claiming the forfeitures supposedly owned by Maryland National, the indictment said. The other effect would be to influence Ward to withhold objections to motions by Maryland National to set aside bond forfeiture judgments, it was charged.

Assistant district attorney

William R. Alford recommended bonds of \$500 for each defendant. Judge Bagert said that he would allow the attorneys to sign recognizance bonds in the same amount.

WANTS INVESTIGATION

Ward said that he still hoped the grand jury would investigate his allegations that attorney Ralph Kaskell, who has represented Maryland National, attempted to extort a settlement from the DA's office on the forfeitures.

Ward asked first assistant DA James L. Alcock, and Fernand S. Lapeyre, jury foreman, if the investigation would continue. Alcock said he did not know, and Lapeyre reserved comment.

Ward has claimed that Kaskell threatened to reveal allegations of bribery made against him by W. Hardy Davis, if the settlement with Maryland National were not accepted. Davis, now of Atlanta, Ga., is a former official of Century Assurity, testified before the grand jury the previous Thursday.

Before the investigation was launched Ward resigned as first assistant DA, claiming that Garrison used the bribery allegations as a pretext to withdraw a recommendation for Ward for one of two new criminal district court judgeships, which were later filled by the governor.

At the same time, Ward announced that he would run against Garrison for the office of DA.