

Bail-Bond Farce ³⁻⁷ _{8/30/69}

The astounding case of repeat-offender Gerald Dawson Norris is a timely example of just how hopelessly deficient is the bail-bond system in New Orleans.

The Norris case has become something of a political football in the current New Orleans district attorney's race. Good—if discussion of the case in the public arena will help spur bail-bond reforms.

From June 7, 1967, to Dec. 8, 1968, Norris was arrested three times in New Orleans—twice on narcotics charges and once for burglary. Norris posted a total of \$20,000 in bail bonds in that period. But, he was not brought to trial once, and he fled the state. The bail bonds were forfeited, but they were never collected by the Orleans Parish district attorney's office.

Attorney Harry Connick, a candidate for district attorney, says he found Norris serving a sentence for burglary in North Carolina after Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison and his staff failed to locate the fugitive.

First Asst. Dist. Atty. James L. Alcock has offered a variety of excuses why the DA's office never succeeded in getting Norris to trial.

True enough, as Mr. Alcock observes, the United States Constitution does grant a criminal defend-

ant the right to be free under bond; and, true enough, the Nixon administration is reviewing bail-bond procedures and considering new restrictions for repeat-offenders.

But the U.S. Constitution says only that bail fixed by the courts should be "reasonable." Question: *Is a total of \$20,000 for three offenses for an offender with Norris' record reasonable?*

And must we always wait for the federal government to resolve all problems that reach to the local level?

Perhaps a more tough-minded attitude on the part of the district attorney's office could have persuaded the court to fix a more "reasonable" bond for Norris. Apparently North Carolina succeeded.

How many other cases like Norris' are there? The New Orleans bail-bond system, as practiced, is a disgrace, freeing repeat-criminals to commit more crimes. It is a matter which deserves the most serious concern of the New Orleans public, the local judiciary, bar association and the district attorney's office.

Alibis in place of aggressive action to encourage the obviously needed reforms should not be accepted by the public.