

Kohn and School Board Blasted by Grand Jury

1-P 3/8/68
Statement Released at
Press Conference

The outgoing Orleans Parish Grand Jury Thursday issued a statement blasting Metropolitan Crime Commission director Aaron M. Kohn and criticizing the Orleans Parish School Board.

A statement was released during a press conference held by Mrs. Dolores V. Mason Smith and Walter O. Eckert Sr., members who said they represented the rest of the jury, which completed a six-month term Wednesday.

Criticism of Kohn dealt with MCC allegations of organized crime.

"The allegations of organized crime in this parish have been

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fathered by the MCC and published, with their approval, in Life magazine," the statement said.

The jury emphasized that it was not against "a properly handled crime commission."

The only complaint is with "thoughtless individuals, who, without sufficient foundation, make allegations and then fail to produce proof of these allegations and refuse to give what information they might have to the proper officials," the jury said.

Mrs. Smith acknowledged that the commission is made up of respected members of the community, but added:

"When they allow one man to act as a spokesman and when they parrot that man, it is no longer a commission, it is one man."

'NOT PAWNS'

Mrs. Smith accused Kohn of having "smeared" the jury.

"He has said we are pawns of the district attorney. We are not pawns. We are 12 intelligent people of the community," she asserted.

The jury's statement said that organized crime can flourish only with cooperation of the mayor, the chief of police, and the district attorney. No one public official is capable of protecting the "so-called 'syndicate,' the jury said.

"To accept Mr. Kohn's view, in this particular area, we must assume the dishonesty of all the aforementioned public officials plus a dishonest governor," the statement continued.

The jury's investigation into organized crime last year included testimony from Gov. John J. McKeithen, Gen. Thomas Burbank, commander of state police, Chief of Police Joseph I. Giarrusso, vice-squad commander Lt. Frederick A. Soule Sr. and District Attorney

Jim Garrison, the report indicated.

"Unless we think them incapable, or lying under oath, then we must believe there is no 'organized crime' in Orleans Parish. The weight of these officials' testimony far outweighs the allegations of one man's fantasy."

SENT TO JAIL

Kohn was sent to parish prison for contempt after refusing to reveal confidential MCC informants to the jury last year. He was released pending outcome of appeals.

The jury statement also disagreed with the Orleans Parish School Board for using "taxpayers' money" in promoting a recent successful bond issue.

"There is no equal representation available by which the same amount of taxpayers' money is spent against the same issue," the statement said.

School Board officials were called before the jury shortly before the bond election ostensibly to give information about financial transactions.

Eckert said the jury found that taxpayers' money was being used to advertise the bond issue, but added there is nothing illegal about such use of public money.

He said officials were not called specifically for this reason. "It probably just came up as a point," he said.

The jury agreed with a previous jury report that names of children under 17 who are arrested should be published.

"If his name is published then neighbors in his area know to keep an eye on him, which could deter his actions; and parents who do not want the notoriety will keep a tighter rein on their children," the jury said.

Eckert also criticized so-called "academic freedom" on college and university campuses.

"That should have been cut out 25 years ago. We didn't have it when we went to school and I don't see why those kids should have it today," he said.