Melvin Belli Defends His Ruby Trial Tirade

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Staff Reporter

Melvin Belli yesterday defended his handling of the Jack Ruby case — from his decision to put Dallas on trial to the tirade he delivered when Ruby got the death sentence.

In rapid-fire style, the contentious, often flamboyant San Francisco attorney declared at a press conference at the National Lawyers Club that:

• Making the atmosphere of Dallas an issue was the only way he could have tried the case without getting a change of venue. There was, he said, "an unconscious feeling that they had to put him (Ruby) in the electric chair to show that they were a law abiding city."

• "We were dead when we didn't get a chance of venue." He described Dallas as an "electric chair city" where 24 out of 25 in a murder trial get the death penalty.

• The report by three psychiatrists Monday that Ruby is mentally ill backs up his contention that Ruby was not guilty by reason of insanity.

• Being fired by the Ruby family was understandable. "I couldn't have done them any good" on an appeal in Texas after those bitter remarks about Dallas.

• There is a Dallas-inspired campaign of "economic reprisal" against him for defending Ruby. He said his insurance has been canceled as well as television and radio shows and book contracts. He declined to name the individuals involved, saying he intended to file suit.

• He had no regrets about his emotional tirade after Ruby received the death sentence for the slaying of Oswald. "I'm satisfied that this was a railroad and I'm satisfied that this was a kangaroo court.

"It's a little bit vitriolic," Belli conceded. "It means there wasn't due process of law for Jack Ruby. I don't regret a word I said."

Belli yesterday presented an appearance far different from that emotion-charged day last March 15 in Dallas. He spoke in soft, reasoned tones, seldom raised his voice and occasionally quipped with reporters.

Later, in the evening, he spoke at the 21st annual dinner of the Howard University School of Law. His topic was, "The Defense of the Unpopular Client."