

DA, Ward Views Differ on Bail Bonds Collection

Each Places Blame on Other's Shoulder

District Attorney Jim Garrison has admitted he made a mistake in the collection of forfeited bail bonds because he said he was "betrayed" by his former assistant district attorney, Charles R. Ward.

However, Ward takes a different viewpoint and places the blame on Garrison.

"As an elected official charged with running this office, I must take full responsibility and admit my error," said Garrison. "However," he added, "the error consisted of placing my full confidence in one man who betrayed my confidence."

GARRISON'S CLAIM

Garrison said the man in Question was Ward. (Ward resigned his post as assistant district attorney on June 17 and is now running against Garrison for district attorney in the Democratic primary election in November.)

However, Ward has said that Garrison did not want to crack down on Maryland National Insurance Company.

Garrison's statement was prompted by disclosures that the DA's office failed to collect \$637,325 in forfeited bail bonds from the Maryland National during the period from Jan. 2, 1966 to Jan. 1, 1969.

The district attorney said the failure to move strongly against Maryland National in 1967 or 1968 was "the one serious mistake" committed during his seven-year administration. But Garrison has maintained that the money will be collected eventually.

\$93,450 FORFEITED

(An additional \$93,450 has been forfeited during 1969, bringing the grand total of Maryland National forfeitures since 1966 to \$720,775. The latest forfeitures, however, are mostly not collectible yet because the law requires a six-month waiting period before action can be

taken.

Ward said Garrison did not want to crack down on Maryland National because he was satisfied to get token monthly payments against the total.

These monthly payments, Ward asserted, were used to finance the DA's investigation of New Orleans businessman Clay L. Shaw, who was acquitted last March on charges that he had conspired to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

WARD'S CLAIM

Ward said Garrison preferred the token payments because a move to obtain the entire amount would have led to a lengthy court fight of two or three years, during which time there would be no payments.

Both Garrison and Ward issued statements concerning their individual involvement in the bail bond affair.

In his statement, Garrison said he first became aware of Maryland National's huge indebtedness in December, 1968. "I ordered Ward to crack down on Maryland National. He dragged his feet. So I ordered him again to take action."

DA MAINTAINS

Garrison maintained that he told Ward to collect every penny due from Maryland National. But the district attorney said Ward told him that such a crack down would put Maryland National out of business.

"Put them out of business then. We've put bail bonding companies out of business before," Garrison said he told Ward.

Several weeks later, Garrison said, he learned that no firm action had been taken so he called Ward in a second time and instructed him to crack down on Maryland National.

TEAM FORMED

"By that time I was suspicious," Garrison stated, "and formed a team, including Clyde Merritt (an accountant who works for his office) and Shirley Wimberly (an assistant DA) to look further into the situation."

"There is no doubt in my

mind that this situation was due to surface anyway. It couldn't be kept hidden.

"The situation was created because I trusted Ward. During the investigation of the murder of President Kennedy, I allowed Ward to make oral reports to me on the status of the bail bond companies' accounts.

"I should have made Ward put the records in front of me. I should have made the accountant in the office directly responsible to me. What I've learned from this is that you can never have the people with the records reporting to anyone but the top man.

'GOOD SYSTEM'

"We put in a good system for controlling the bail bond company when I was first elected seven years ago. I was mistaken in accepting a good system and not insisting on a fool-proof system.

"So, now we're putting in a fool-proof system."

In his statement, Ward

maintained that the collections of bail bonds by the DA's office lagged because of Garrison's Kennedy investigation.

"When the investigation began, all bonding companies were in a precarious financial position as a result of strenuous collection efforts," said Ward.

THREE COMPANIES

At that time, according to Ward, at least three bond insurance companies were considering withdrawal from Louisiana; one had already gone bankrupt.

"Garrison was informed that the bail bond companies had offered to make periodic monthly payments to reduce their outstanding liability or they would probably go out of business.

"Garrison unhesitatingly and eagerly accepted the offer of periodic monthly payments, saying 'We are not going to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.'

MONTHLY PAYMENTS

"It was anticipated by Garrison at this time that the additional periodic monthly payments would be used to help pay the expenses of the assassination investigation," stated

Ward.

Ward emphasized that the ball bonding investigation was begun under his (Ward's) direction prior to his resignation.

"If Garrison has ever misplaced his trust, he did so when he believed he had solved the Kennedy assassination; when he devoted his time and most of the resources of the DA's office to the investigation and trial of Clay Shaw instead of directing these efforts to fighting crime in the streets of New Orleans," said Ward.

ACTION BY JUDGE

The DA's office has been prohibited by a federal judge since June 23 from moving to collect the forfeited bail bonds or to prevent Maryland National from running up additional forfeitures.

Since the company is required to keep only \$70,000 on deposit in the state of Louisiana, Garrison is faced with a court fight before he can collect any part of the money owed by Maryland National.

In the meantime, Garrison has assigned assistant district attorney Wimberly to set up a system to prevent any recurrence of the Maryland National incident.

NEW PROCEDURE

Wimberly has revamped the bookkeeping system used to track bail bond forfeitures and also the approach to collecting forfeitures.

The new procedure gives ball bond company 10 days to pay off a forfeited bond after the six-month waiting period expires. If the company does not pay off the bond Wimberly acts to seize the forfeited sum out of the \$70,000 each ball bond company must post with the state treasurer.

If a company's \$70,000 is seized and not replaced, the company is out of business in Louisiana.