

Laughlin Pleads Not Guilty in Baltimore Case

Lawyer Charges Indictment Seeks To Discredit Him

James J. Laughlin, whose activities caused him to be ousted as a defense attorney in the mass sedition trial here, appeared in Baltimore Federal Court today and pleaded not guilty to charges of obstructing and impeding justice in connection with the 1941 Hyattsville bank robbery.

Judge William C. Coleman set the trial for September 11 and indicated he would not consider a postponement. Bond was continued at \$2,500.

Mr. Laughlin immediately filed a motion asking for a delay in the trial date in which he reiterated earlier charges that his indictment was "inspired in an effort to discredit him" as an attorney in the sedition trial.

Attacks Grand Jury.

He also attacked the grand jury which returned the true bill against him for what he termed a lack of secrecy. He said this condition raised a "serious question" as to the functioning of the Federal grand jury for Maryland and cited a radio prediction concerning possible action against him in Baltimore which was made over the radio by Drew Pearson on May 21, about two weeks before the grand jury acted.

Mr. Laughlin was given until August 7 to file any other pretrial motions he cared to submit. He informed Judge Coleman that if the arrangement is "satisfactory" to the court, he will continue to act as his own counsel in the case "for the moment."

The attorney, who was ordered out of the sedition trial by Chief Justice Edward C. Eicher of District Court here on July 5, after he filed a petition with the Speaker of the House asking for Justice Eicher's impeachment, told the Baltimore jurist today that it would be necessary for him to call certain persons in the sedition trial to appear as witnesses for him in the Baltimore case.

Ouster Appeal Still Issue.

He also informed Judge Coleman that his appeal from his ouster from the Washington proceedings still

was at issue, since it was confirmed by the United States Court of Appeals in a 2-to-1 decision and was, therefore, inconclusive. Under the circumstances, Mr. Laughlin said, he might be obliged to return to Washington at any time to resume his defense of Robert Noble and Edward James Smythe, two defendants.

Mr. Laughlin was indicted by a Federal grand jury in Baltimore on June 2 on charges arising out of the trial of persons later convicted of robbing the Prince Georges County Bank & Trust Co., in Hyattsville, on September 25, 1941.

The Government charges that Mr. Laughlin, in his defense of his client, Hilliard Sanders, used an allegedly forged prison record in an effort to show that Sanders was actually a visitor at the Florida State Prison on the day of the crime. It also is charged that L. F. Chapman, superintendent of the penitentiary, was misled into making a statement that he was "almost certain" Sanders had visited the prison on that day.

Accused of Obstruction.

Another count of the indictment returned by the Baltimore grand jury charges that between January 12 and February 5, 1942, while a motion for a new trial for Sanders and Leo Keefe, a co-defendant, was pending, Mr. Laughlin "unlawfully and knowingly did corruptly endeavor to influence and obstruct and impede the course of justice" by filing eight affidavits tending to support Sanders' alibi that he had been at the Florida prison on the day of the robbery.

The robbery of two messengers for the Hyattsville bank was one of the most spectacular ever recorded in this area and involved a loot of \$52,616.95 in cash and \$75,000 in non-negotiable cashier's checks. The messengers, Jack Dameron, 17, of Hyattsville, and Van Stauber, 18, University Park, were en route from the bank to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission offices in Hyattsville to leave a \$16,000 payroll when their car was blocked by a small black sedan containing three men.

Two of the men leaped out of the car with guns in their hands and seized the satchel carried by one of the messengers. As they were returning to their car, the man inside called attention to a second satchel still in possession of the messengers. The other two hurried back to the car and seized this bag, after which the sedan raced off toward Washington.

Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with Maryland and District police, began a search for the bandits. Sanders was the first to be arrested, the following October. Later Keefe was picked up. They were tried together in January, 1942, and each was given a 20-year sentence and a \$5,000 fine.

Later, three others were arrested and sentenced to prison for being involved in the robbery.