

La. Inquiry Called Attempt to Force Testimony Change



—AP WIREPHOTO.
TESTIFYING BEFORE the Labor-Management Commission of Inquiry Monday in Baton Rouge, Teamster boss Edward Grady Partin waves a copy of the state's argument before the Louisiana Supreme Court. He claims the argument proves existence of a plot to get him to change his federal court testimony about imprisoned ex-Teamster chief James C. Hoffa.

Partin Lists Charges at Hearing

5-7-68
By C. M. HARGRODER

(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)
BATON ROUGE, La.—Teamster business agent Edward Grady Partin Monday charged the whole Labor-Management Commission of inquiry was an attempt to force him to change previous testimony which resulted in conviction of Teamster boss James Hoffa.

His charge came in a prepared statement he read to the commission in which he repeated charges he injected in a federal court action Friday that there was a conspiracy of commission employees to murder six Teamsters.

The commission meets Tuesday in executive session at which time Dr. Paul M. Hebert, vice-chairman, indicated he would urge that the Partin statement be stricken from the records as "irrelevant" and "not germane" to the inquiry.

The commission's intent Monday was to hear of conditions which caused the construction shutdown last July in this area, the present climate of labor-management relations, and to obtain recommendations to improve that climate.

SAID PREPOSTEROUS

Partin's statement, said Hebert, was a "preposterous" assortment of "incongruities" which charged that "virtually everything that has happened" was "a part of some giant conspiracy . . . on its face ridiculous." There was doubt that such a statement should be incorporated in the records, he said, and the commission will decide Tuesday in closed session. The result, he said, would be made public at a subsequent hearing.

There was a clash of personality later in the day at a brief recess when city Judge William Hawk Daniels, former assistant district attorney, accosted A. Harry Roberts, chief commission investigator, in the lobby and accused Roberts of violating an agreement.

State AFL-CIO leader, Vic-

tor Bussie, the leadoff witness of seven heard Monday, pinpointed the major cause of the July, 1967, shutdown as "a great deal of greed" on the part of union, contractors and clients, largely brought on by cost plus contracts.

Bussie itemized the underlying problems as "extreme shortage of skilled labor," and shortages of materials and equipment. These, he said led to "loose operations . . . greed . . . and poor judgment."

As for the shutdown itself he said that the boom construction period resulted in many clients rushing to contractors who offered incentives to labor beyond contract agreements to get their projects completed.

BUSSIE CHARGES

Contractors, he charged, often offered union labor "many other considerations . . . not dealt with in their contracts." He alleged that some contractors offered travel time and said there were even instances where contractors hired too many men for the work to be performed because cost plus contracts required these positions be filled.

As evidence of his greed allegations, Bussie declared one contractor obtained the use of 48 cranes with an operator for each "when the most he could

Cont. in Sec. 1, Page 3, Col. 1

INQUIRY RIPPED BY PARTIN

Continued from Page 1

have used on any one day was 20."

The state labor leader continued he had been told of numerous instances of employes being hired to stay home because the contractors thought it would be embarrassing to idle on the job. This, Bussie said, "affected moral of the men on the job."

"If both labor and management had lived up to the contracts existing, there would have been no shutdown," Bussie averred. He said the contracts "were clear enough."

He also told the commission, "I think there was some breakdown in law enforcement." He did not clarify.

James H. Gill, manager of the Baton Rouge Industrial Contractors Association, opened his testimony declaring, "I have never offered any money or rewards to anyone to violate any law."

Gill, too, declared the chief difficulty last summer was the failure of some contractors and unions to honor their contracts. He itemized the problems as the unusual building boom, a shortage of skilled craftsmen and the bidding for union employes offering benefits beyond the contracts.

"This bidding for non-contract benefits became a matter for daily job site bargaining agreements," Gill said.

FINAL STRAW

He said the final straw "was the failure of the local electrical union and the local Teamster union to resolve their jurisdictional disputes." Such disputes, he said, are usually referred to the international union; but contractors were unable to get union leaders to meet.

Gill declared that "memorandum of understanding" executed by contractors and unions late last summer has done much to improve relations. In addition, he said, the Labor-Management Commission "has helped to stabilize the area."

Gill also recommended that contractors and union leaders should recognize their responsibility to follow contract pro-

cedures. "Work stoppages are in violation of these agreements," he said, adding that the appropriate time to bargain is when contracts are renewed, "not daily on the job."

Industrial investment in Louisiana for the first three months of 1968 is down 28 per cent for a similar period in 1967, W. T. Hackett Jr., director of commerce and industry, told the commission.

Because plant announcements and construction starts continue, people have a tendency to assume that we are weathering last summer's storm," Hackett said. "This is not entirely true." Hackett continued, "According to the records of my department, industrial investment in Louisiana for the first quarter of 1968 was down 20 per cent from the average for the first quarters of the 1965-67 period."

Hackett told the commission "it is not unusual for construction costs in the Baton Rouge area to run 10 to 20 per cent higher than in the Houston area."

He continued, "the net effect has been to make it more difficult to sell Louisiana as an ideal industrial location. Construction labor cost can run as much as 40 per cent of the total cost of a new plant. On a \$100 million plant that is \$40 million. Anything that tends to drive that cost still higher is bound to make industry pause."

HACKETT SAYS

Hackett told the commission "I do not expect a sudden cessation of plants moving into this area, but rather a slow, but steady decline. And the longer we slide down hill the longer it will take us to get back on top. The plants we have lost, the plants we are losing, and the plants we will lose in the future are irrevocably lost. We can never get them back."

Hackett warned that either the present situation "must be changed or we must resign ourselves to a steady decline in industrial growth in the Baton Rouge area, and to a lesser ex-

tent throughout the state as well."

Ralph Howe, manager of the Baton Rouge Humble Refinery and member of the commission, said his information showed the Baton Rouge labor force, prior to the building boom, had dropped as low as 4,500 men, and had rebuilt to an estimated 12,000 to 14,000.

"This presents a real strain on the effective productivity... because of dilution of skills" resulting from the addition of the "necessary" number of men.

Materials, he said, "dropped down to the disappearing point" at the time of the July shutdown, and employes often "had to work around" portions of the project on which materials were delayed.

On his own construction project, Howe charged, there were several episodes of equipment sabotage. He said electric cords were cut, conduits and cables were sawed through. It presented hazardous conditions not only to construction employes but to permanent plant personnel as well he said. When the reports circulated that members of "the two warring factions (Teamsters and electricians) were carrying weapons," he said he decided to shutdown construction at Humble.

Partin testified that proof of the conspiracy can be found in legal arguments by State Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion in the removal case of New Orleans Dist. Judge Malcolm O'Hara before the state supreme court.

The labor leader lashed out at Gov. John McKeithen, say-

ing the governor has been part of the effort to get rid of him and his union.

McKeithen, he said, has successfully established a virtual police state in Louisiana that makes Huey Long's dictatorial tactics look like kindergarten stuff."

Agents of the commission have been accused of bribery in court proceedings, Partin said, but these accusations have brought no protests or investigations by members of the agency.

Neither has a commission investigation been launched to determine if it is true that six Teamsters have been "singled out for murder by agents of the commission," as charged in a federal court petition, Partin said.

He said commission agents engaged in "storm-trooper tactics" in arresting members of the teamsters local last week.

Partin also charged that Asst. Atty. Gen. Thomas McFerring, who handles the commission's legal duties, offered teamster Wade McClanahan a \$100,000 bribe to get him to sign a statement involving Partin in criminal activities.

"It has also been charged that this money, this bribe money, was to be donated by Texaco, Shell and Esso Oil Companies," he said.