

PARTIN ALLEGES IMMUNITY GIVEN

TP 1/17/68
 Testimony Given in Case of Labor Charges

Baton Rouge Teamster leader Edward Grady Partin claimed Wednesday in Federal District Court that he was granted immunity from prosecution at a meeting with U.S. Justice Department officials in Nashville, Tenn., in 1968.

Partin was the first witness called as Federal District Judge William D. Murray of Butte, Mont., began hearing technical motions filed in connection with the indictment of Partin, Ted Dunham Jr., and several Baton Rouge concrete products firms which Dunham heads.

The indictment charges that the defendants violated the anti-trust and anti-racketeering statutes and conspired to coerce contractors to purchase products from Dunham's firms by threats of strikes and violence.

The hearing of technical pleadings is expected to take several days.

Judge Murray was assigned the case after Chief Judge E. Gordon West of Baton Rouge recused himself.

About 50 technical motions have been filed by the defense, including the one in which Partin seeks dismissal of the charges against him on grounds that he was given immunity.

VENUE CHANGE ASKED

Among motions to be heard is one seeking a change of venue on the contention that a fair trial cannot be held in Baton Rouge because of publicity surrounding the labor situation in that area.

When Partin was called to the witness stand by his attorney, Edward M. Baldwin, he told of a meeting on the night of Oct. 3, 1968, at the home of Gilbert Merritt, former United States Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, at which he claims he was given immuni-

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ty from prosecution in return for his testimony at a grand jury session the next day in Nashville.

That grand jury was investigating the alleged bribery of witnesses at the jury tampering trial of Teamster International President James L. Hoffa.

Partin testified that among those present at the meeting were Merritt, TV newsman Walter Sheridan, who was formerly a Justice Department investigator, and Michael Epstein, an attorney for the Justice Department.

He claimed there was a discussion of his signing a waiver of immunity and when he asked if he was "automatically covered" if he did not sign, Merritt told him that he was and Epstein nodded in agreement.

He then discussed in detail with those present the labor situation in the Baton Rouge area, including work stoppages, the Labor Management Commission of Inquiry, and the W. O. Bergeron Construction Company job in Plaquemine at which there was a shooting incident which has resulted in last month's conviction of former Teamster strongman Wade McClanahan on an aggravated assault charge.

Under cross examination by Justice Department attorney Wilford Whitley, Partin would not answer directly when asked if he was promised immunity from prosecution.

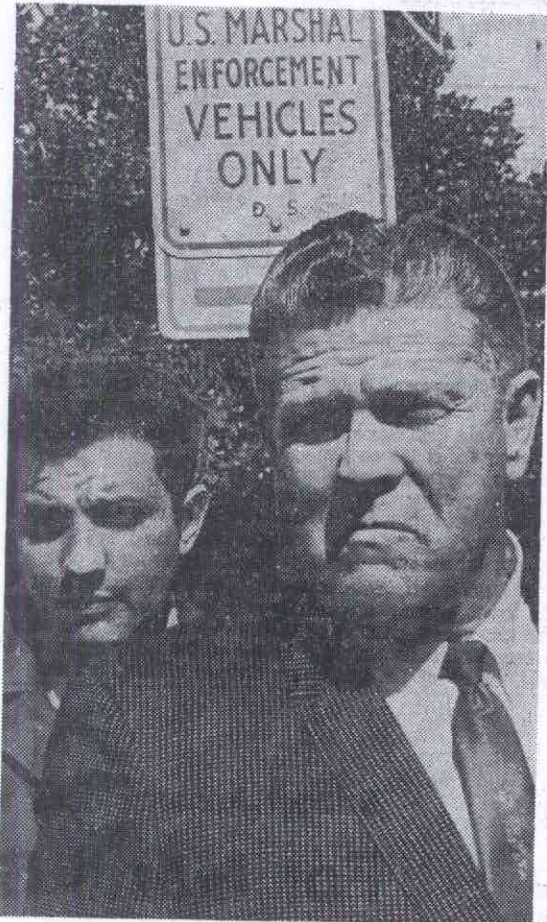
He answered "In my opinion, yes. . . they said that I had nothing to worry about, that's why I testified."

DENIAL GIVEN

When Merritt was on the stand he denied that he or anyone else at his home told Partin that he would be immune from prosecution.

Merritt testified that at the meeting Partin was apprehensive about going before the grand jury the next day and he told Partin that the purpose of the grand jury was not focused on him, that he was called as a witness, not as a subject.

The former prosecutor told the court that he told Partin that the Nashville grand jury had nothing to do with the



LAP WIREPHOTO.
 TEAMSTER leader Edward Grady Partin (right) leaves court in New Orleans, where he took the witness stand Wednesday to support his claim that federal authorities promised him immunity from prosecution in labor racketeering cases. At left is attorney Lou Merhige. Partin is asking dismissal of two indictments on the grounds of immunity.

Louisiana case.

Another defense witness, Baton Rouge City Judge William Hawk Daniels, said he was present at the meeting at Merritt's residence and he described the Nashville grand jury investigation as a continuation of an investigation begun earlier in New Orleans by a federal grand jury.

He said there was a discussion of immunity, but he could not remember particulars.

Epstein testified that, at one time, the Justice Department was investigating certain persons connected with the Labor Management Commission of In-

quiry in connection with alleged efforts to get Partin to change the testimony he gave in the Hoffa case and which was instrumental in Hoffa's conviction.

THREAT ALLEGED

Meanwhile, the New Orleans States-Item, in a dispatch from Baton Rouge Wednesday, quoted McClanahan as saying his life was threatened last month in a Baton Rouge jail.

He told a reporter that three men—Partin and two other union officials—went to his cell in the jail Jan. 16 only one day after he was returned to Baton Rouge following conviction on a g r a v a t e d assault charges in Shreveport.

McClanahan, who Tuesday was convicted on a charge of stealing a \$650 welding machine from a construction site in December, 1965, was reported to have said that he has offered testimony against Partin, his former boss.

"I don't know who let them back there," McClanahan said, telling of the reported threat, "I told them I was going to testify against them and they told me I wouldn't live to get to the courthouse."

While McClanahan was being transferred back to Shreveport Jan. 15, federal au-

thorities obtained a writ giving them custody of McClanahan. During his trial in Baton Rouge Tuesday, he was kept under watch by federal officials, including four to five marshals.