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A Fighting Prosecutor
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William Omar Bittman

WASHINGTON, Jan. 29—In the spring of 1964, five days after the fraud trial of James R. Hoffa began in Chicago, a tough young lawyer named William Omar Bittman walked upon the scene cold. The chief prosecutor, Abe Poretz, was seriously ill and forced to withdraw. The trial

involved \$621-million in allegedly fraudulent loans from the Teamsters union fund. There were seven

defendants. The charges were based on more than five years' research by squadrons of lawyers and agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The documents filled 50 filing cases in the offices of the United States attorney.

"Bill Bittman didn't know fact one, he didn't know theory one," said Donald Page Moore, who headed the back-up team from the Justice Department.

One hundred and twenty witnesses and 12 weeks later, Mr. Bittman had won the case. "It was just unbelievable," Mr. Moore said.

Assigned Bodyguards

During the trial, according to widely published reports, Mr. Bittman was cursed and threatened daily. For the last five weeks he was accompanied everywhere by two bodyguards.

He looks and acts like a man who can take care of himself, however. He is thick-necked and powerful looking and six feet tall. He weighs 195 pounds and has a bulldog jaw. He will be 36 years old next Aug. 6, and was unusually young to prosecute a case as important as the one against Robert G. Baker, who was convicted today of tax evasion, theft and conspiracy to defraud the Government.

Yet Mr. Bittman and his colleagues considered this trial "a snap" by comparison with the Hoffa endurance test, when for weeks the young prosecutor was only a step ahead of the witnesses in his home work. He has had two years to prepare himself for the trial of Mr. Baker.

According to associates, Mr. Bittman is a fighter. He is aggressive in his questioning and sometimes swarms orally over witnesses in cross-examination. He has been described as "stubborn—a stubborn Dutchman" and "a little on the humorless side."

His father, an official in the Labor Department's office in Milwaukee, where Mr. Bittman was born and reared, is of German descent. His mother is what Mr. Bittman calls "Holland-Dutch."

He was educated in parochial schools in Milwaukee.

Interrupted by two years in the Navy during the Korean War. However, he was "not even an involuntary hero," Mr. Bittman says, and did not see combat.

He and his wife, the former Carole Chilette, were married soon after Mr. Bittman got his bachelor's degree. Then they moved to Chicago, her home town. In 1959, he was graduated from De Paul University Law School and went into the United States Attorney's office.

Intensely ambitious and competitive, he "hustled" cases around Municipal Court, handling perhaps half again as many as any other lawyer in that office.

"He kept it up and kept it up until he was a star," one of those who worked with him in those days said. But his first real headline trial was Hoffa's.

Mr. Bittman is obviously brainy, but he is not an intellectual. "I doubt if he reads a dozen books a year," an associate said. "He learns by listening and talking, not by reading."

He is a devout Roman Catholic. During the weeks of the Hoffa trial, his only extracurricular activity was going to mass on Sunday. His wife teaches in the Sunday school of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Potomac, Md.

The Bittmans have six children, from 9 years to 9 months old. A seventh child is expected in late March. They live in a big house in Bethesda, Md., a Washington suburb, where Mr. Bittman keeps the more rambunctious little ones in line by "barking at them like a top sergeant," a friend said. "He gives them orders, but they know he loves them."



Associated Press

Swarms over witnesses

The prosecutor's only relaxations seem to be golf and watching football on television (he was a linebacker for Marquette). His whisky sours are considered superior by those who have tasted them.