

Office Oath For Ourso Is Blocked

(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—A temporary restraining order preventing Iberville Parish Sheriff Jessel Ourso from taking office July 1 was signed today by a state district judge at the request of Attorney General Jack P. F. Gremillion, who declared he was moving to "prevent physical violence" in the parish.

Ourso, who has been suspended from office while a civil ouster suit is pending, normally would be eligible to take the oath of office for a new term July 1.

GREMILLION charged in a suit filed in 18th Judicial District Court this morning that Ourso had not obtained a discharge from the suspension order and therefore is not qualified to assume his duties.

The temporary restraining order was signed by District Judge Daniel Kimball, who set July 5 for a hearing on issuance of a permanent injunction.

Ourso is also charged with 33 counts of bribery, extortion and malfeasance in a parallel to the civil ouster suit which grew out of a probe by the State Labor-Management Commission into racketeering in the Baton Rouge industrial area.

Gremillion said that at various times, particularly within the past two weeks, Ourso "has openly threatened to take an oath of office . . . at the beginning of the new term."

HE SAID OURSO will attempt to supplant Dr. C. E. Blunck, coroner and acting sheriff, who runs the criminal section of the department, and legislative auditor J. B. Lancaster, who has charge of the tax collecting part.

Gremillion said it would be necessary "to bring in state police to maintain law and order" if Ourso is permitted to take the oath of office.

The civil ouster suit was

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filed Feb. 15 against Ourso. Four days later Gov. John J. McKeithen signed an executive order suspending Ourso, claiming he had failed to account for \$43,000 in fees collected from a private guard service. The state said the fees should have been remitted to the state.

The state's position was upheld in a suit by Ourso heard in 19th Judicial District Court in Baton Rouge.

Gremillion cited the state constitution which says in part:

"No person who, at any time, may have been a collector of taxes . . . or who may have been otherwise entrusted with public money, shall be eligible . . . to any office of honor, profit, or trust . . . until he shall have obtained a discharge for the amount of such collections. . . ."

In his suit, the attorney general declared, "Defendant has not obtained a discharge in the amount of \$43,121 and therefore is not eligible or qualified to assume the duties of sheriff of Iberville Parish."

The status of Ourso, who was reelected to another term last year before the charges were filed, and his position regarding a new term has been uncertain.

There has been talk that McKeithen would attempt to address him out of office, but that has subsided in the face of legislative reluctance to act as a trial jury in a case pending in court.

The sheriff won a delay in all court proceedings until after the Legislature adjourns its 60-day session because one of his attorneys is a representative. The adjournment date is after the date Ourso would be eligible to take the new oath and there has been some question whether the ouster proceedings, applied only to the term in which the alleged acts occurred.

McKeithen said he did not plan to issue a commission to Ourso.