

MCC Defends Four Indicted In Jefferson

The Metropolitan Crime Commission today came to the defense of four present and former Jefferson Parish School Board members under indictment in connection with their actions as board members.

In a statement signed by MCC president Dr. J. D. Grey, the group urged the public to "reserve judgment" on the indictments in the light of the circumstances under which they were returned.

Dr. Grey said the grand jury which returned the indictments is dependent for information upon District Attorney Frank H. Langridge. Dr. Grey said Langridge is guilty, along with Assessor Lawrence A. Chehardy, of "obstructing the development of a healthy political and economic climate."

THOSE INDICTED were Leon E. Soniat Jr., George C. Gibson, G. Robert Murphy and Paul M. Pope Jr. All, Dr. Grey said, are political opponents of Chehardy. Other board members who have not criticized the assessor were not indicted, he said.

Dr. Grey said the four "provided the school board with policies and practices for businesslike management . . . They terminated ward boss control of employment and expenditures."

In so doing, he said, the four made enemies among those "hurt politically and financially."

"WE WOULD have to believe that a fundamental change took place in their characters if they are to be believed guilty of the charges for which they were indicted."

Langridge, on the other hand, "has consistently been a most important asset to the . . . alliances which impair healthy progress in Jefferson Parish," Dr. Grey said. "Public officials and others clearly deserving of criminal prosecution have been protected by Mr. Langridge and his office for many years.

"He has the power and means to cause unjustified indictments against his enemies, as we believe true in this case."

CHEHARDY, Dr. Grey said, "has repeatedly misled the public."

Chehardy's methods, he said, "can best be described as widespread financial seduction of the citizens of Jefferson Parish into a state of irresponsibility. By deluding large numbers of people into believing they can get a 'free ride', he seeks to escape criticism for lightening the tax burdens of his political friends and underworld characters with huge property holdings."

— J. P. [unclear]