

SATURDAY

BILL LYNCH: LOUISIANA POLITICS



McKeithen Picks Authors Of 'Quickie' Probe Bill

BATON ROUGE—There is considerable skepticism over the motivation of the McKeithen administration in pushing for a "quickie" investigation of the Life magazine allegations of influence by organized crime in state government. For one thing, it hardly appears the Legislature can conduct an independent probe if the Executive Branch has laid the ground rules and determined who will do the investigating.

The resolution put forth by Sens. Charles Barham of Ruston, Adrian Duplantier of New Orleans and Joe LeSage of Shreveport can now clearly be labeled a product of Gov. John J. McKeithen.

It was the governor who picked Barham and LeSage to sponsor the resolution and the administration had no difficulty getting Duplantier, who is personally opposed to such investigations, to add his name.

Independent Appearance

Barham and LeSage were chosen by McKeithen because the governor wanted the resolution to appear to be independent of his administration. It was decided that no names of his floor leaders would be on the measure.

The administration resolution, one of three now before the full Senate, originally provided for completion of the investigation 15 days before the end of the 60-day regular session. It was amended in committee to permit continuance of the probe, if the probers feel it is necessary.

The other two resolutions, one sponsored by Sen. Jules Mollere of Metairie and another by Sen. William Guste of New Orleans, and others, are seeking a more in-depth investigation after the Legislature adjourns and by non-elected officials as well as lawmakers.

Reaction to the quickie probe has been to cast doubt on the adequacy of the investigation in the short time available and the limited time legislators can spend, what with the press of regular legislative duties.

It appears that the administration, which conducted its own rushed investigation of the charges, is interested only in tackling the Life article allegations rather than going into other aspects of organized crime.

Skipping Local Government

Further, Sen. Duplantier indicated that the proposed committee may not be inclined to go beyond state officials named in the article, skipping the local governments named, as did the governor's investigating committee.

On top of this, the House has passed a resolution seeking to subpoena David Chandler, author of the Life article, to testify before a joint session of the House and Senate. The resolution must be acted on by the Senate.

Picture the Scene

Can you picture the scene in the Legislature with 144 lawmakers arrayed against one reporter? For dessert they might even bring in LSU's Mike the Tiger.

If the Legislature is truly interested in getting to the heart of the matter, why not subpoena those named in the article as well?

For example, why not Collector of Rev-

enue Ashton Mouton or his chief counsel, Emmett Batson?

Perhaps Mouton could explain why he retained and promoted Batson despite his having failed to file his state income tax returns until it was brought to the attention of the state by Life magazine.

Perhaps Mouton could explain the prescriptions and delays in the mail on tax returns.

Perhaps he could more adequately explain why the state has not been collecting income taxes from all those who should pay.

Perhaps Mouton could also advise whether J. Marshall Brown, State Board of Education member, fully paid the tax claim against him.

The governor's investigating committee said that Brown, a close political ally of McKeithen, made arrangements to pay a

claim on the installment plan and made two such payments. It didn't say if Brown owed on any more installments or how many more there were.

Why Not Sanders, Steimel?

Why not also subpoena Supreme Court Justice Joe W. Sanders, head of the state Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice, whose report clearly establishes the existence of organized crime in the state?

Why not subpoena Ed Steimel of the Public Affairs Research Council, which did the study for Sanders' commission, and who reported that organized crime is costing the state billions of dollars?

The thrust of the legislative resolution on Chandler appears more aimed at intimidation than revelation and the thrust of the administration's investigative committee resolution appears directed more toward another superficial probe about the Life allegations rather than getting something done about organized crime.

The administration has a number of bills it plans to sponsor on organized crime, which were devised by the crime commission. However, the public is not apt to be convinced that this is sufficient if the legislative probers come up with what amounts to a whitewash.

The administration feels confident that it can prove a number of factual errors in the Life article and may thereby discredit the entire story.

Metropolitan Crime Commission Director Aaron Kohn pointed out that it would be unfortunate for the public's interest if the main thrust of the Life article is ignored because of some factual errors.



Duplantier and Barham
Clearly McKeithen's Product