

La. Crime Probe Blasted by Kohn

Metropolitan Crime Commission director Aaron M. Kohn said the Legislature has done the state a great disservice by launching its investigation into organized crime during the "chaos" of the 60-day legislative session.

Speaking to the Kiwanis Club of New Orleans yesterday at the Sheraton Charles Hotel, Kohn said it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the investigating committee, but criticized efforts to prevent private citizens from taking part in the probe.

He said it is theoretically possible for a committee composed solely of legislators to make an effective investigation, but added that apathetic public attitudes are not likely to create the kind of atmosphere essential for such a result.

KOHN said Life Magazine was correct in its recent allegations that alleged Mafia boss Carlos Marcello is stronger than ever in Louisiana.

Efforts of a new law enforcement officials to attack organized crime have been thwarted, he said, by the "vast indifference or active deception" of other public officials.

He cited State Adj. Gen. David Wade, Jefferson Parish Sheriff Alwynn J. Cronvich and "a few men in the New Orleans Police intelligence unit and vice squad" as officials who have done something about the problem.

Others have adopted a "see no evil, hear no evil, status quo" attitude, Kohn charged.

LIFE included a few charges "based on misinformation," the MCC director said, but on the whole brought out facts already documented. He said the article was an indictment against Louisiana citizens who have "failed to demand and get official action to suppress" underworld activity.

Gov. John J. McKeithen's reaction to the article, Kohn said, amounted to a "perpetuation of past failure." The governor's action against Life was based on the idea that "you must punish a doctor who discovers a dread disease," Kohn asserted.

"It's time to stop defending ourselves against allegations of organized crime and start making underworld figures defend themselves against our laws," declared Kohn.

Kohn said the MCC has repeatedly recommended action to McKeithen which has proven effective elsewhere in combating organized crime, but he has ignored every proposal.

Citizen apathy must be overcome, however, Kohn said, before effective action can be taken against the leaders of organized crime and the public officials they corrupt.