

Panel Okays Right to Query

By **BILL LYNCH**

(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—A House committee today gave a narrow 8 to 7 vote of approval to a resolution giving advisory members on the Mafia investigating committee the right to interrogate witnesses directly.

The investigating group was set up by legislative action to look into allegations by Life Magazine that some public officials are controlled by the Mafia.

Six members of the House Judiciary C Committee from New Orleans voted against the resolution, largely on the grounds it might cloud the constitutionality of the body.

REP. J. LUKE LeBlanc of Lafayette, chief sponsor of the move to give citizen members the right to ask questions, said that unless the new resolution is adopted there might not be a committee.

There has been some dissension within the ranks of the combination citizens-legislators group after a decision was made to leave questioning of witnesses up to lawmakers only.

Some members of the citizens group have indicated they will not serve unless the situation is changed.

The investigating committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday in Baton Rouge and will adjust to the new ground rules if the full House approves the remedial resolution in time. It can come up for a floor vote today or tomorrow.

THE ORIGINAL committee was made up of seven legislators and nine citizens. One citizen member declined to serve because of his position in government and a newspaper editor has not yet accepted one post, leaving only seven who have been serving.

LeBlanc said it was most

important for the House committee to approve the resolution.

"I think the people of Louisiana want it," the Lafayette solon said.

"If we don't give them the right. I don't believe we are going to have an advisory committee," he said.

LEROY LANDRY, representing the state AFL-CIO urged the committee to ap-

prove the resolution.

Victor Bussie, president of the state labor body, serves on the Mafia probe unit by virtue of his office.

"If we are going to be given the responsibility of investigating organized crime," Landry said, "we want to do more than just occupy a chair."

Landry said he would like to see the resolution finally

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approved before the Wednesday session.

"**WE DON'T** just want to sit over there and be muzzled," he said. "If it is just to occupy a chair, Mr. Bussie has more important things to do."

He said Bussie had not agreed to a committee decision that advisory members could ask questions by submitting them in writing to the legislators.

LeBlanc noted that some questions submitted at the first public hearing by the advisory members were not asked.

The resolution was approved by a Senate committee as a compromise to a legislative bill submitted by LeBlanc that would have given the advisors the right to subpoena and voting powers as well. LeBlanc agreed to the compromise after Dean Paul M. Hebert of the Louisiana State University Law School spoke against extending the committee's powers. He also had opposed the right to ask questions.

THE ADVISORY group voted in executive session, 4 to 3, to seek the power to question directly.

No one actually spoke in opposition today to the new resolution but most who voted against it expressed fear it would increase the hazard of

being termed unconstitutional.

"I think the members of the committee are concerned about the constitutionality," said Rep. Thomas A. Casey of New Orleans. "I think the progress of the committee could be impeded."

Rep. A. O. Rappelet of Galliano said that if one phase of the advisory committee is termed unconstitutional, the other can be too. He said he could see no difference in having advisors and permitting them to question the witnesses.

LeBLANC indicated he probably will bring the resolution up for a floor vote in the House tomorrow.

Those voting in favor of the resolution were Reps. Irving R. Boudreaux of Baton Rouge, Richard E. Cheek of Baton Rouge, Christian Fazer Jr. of Baton Rouge, O. C. Guilliot of Lafayette, J. Kenneth Liethman of Gretna, Gerald F. Lofaso of Houma, Rappelet and James P. Smith of Farmerville.

Voting against the resolution were Reps. Bernard J. Bagert Jr., Clyde F. Bel Jr., Casey, Ernest N. Morial, James R. Sutterfield, Salvador Anzelmo, all of New Orleans, and Mrs. Helen Laperouse of New Iberia.

Judge to Hear Plea of Writer

U.S. District Judge Lansing L. Mitchell Wednesday will hear the plea of David Chandler, Life magazine writer, that he not be required to testify before a state legislative committee investigating alleged Mafia influence in state government.

Judge Mitchell was given the case Friday after Judge E. Gordon West of Baton Rouge recused himself. Chandler had asked Judge West to step aside because he was mentioned in Chandler's recent article on the Cosa Nostra and state government.

Chandler also has asked a three-judge tribunal to review his challenge of the constitutionality of the legislative committee.