

BILL LYNCH: LOUISIANA POLITICS

Mafia Probers Appear Hostile to Reporter

BATON ROUGE—There seems to be a genuine lack of desire on the part of those running the Mafia investigating committee to develop a spirit of cooperation with Life magazine reporter David Chandler. Whether intended or not, the atmosphere generated by the committee during hearings, "conferences" and press statements seems to be one of general hostility toward Chandler, who lives in New Orleans. The impression is that there are some on the committee and in state government, including Gov. John J. McKeithen, who regard Chandler, rather than organized crime, as the enemy.

Most members of the committee want to get down to the issue of investigating the allegations and any other information about organized crime, but are limited in what they do by the course of conduct of the chairman.

The chairman, Sen. Adrian G. Duplantier of New Orleans, is determined to oper-



Duplantier **Chandler**
The Enemy Is Life?

ate the committee as he sees fit, and is equally determined to see to it that everyone knows this.

The manner in which Duplantier has conducted the committee has left the distinct impression that the group is more interested in discrediting Chandler and finding out who gave him the information upon which he based his article than in attacking the Mafia.

The questions propounded by committee counsel at the Thursday hearing or conference or rendezvous or whatever it was finally called were tossed back by Chandler's attorney as simply an effort to learn the sources of information.

Duplantier has given repeated assurances that this is not so, that the committee earnestly is seeking information about the allegations and only wants to know a source, if that is the only way to verify a specific allegation.

The confrontation between Chandler and the committee was something of a dud, except for the documents turned over to it for investigation by the staff. The meeting only served to emphasize the impression of hostility that has been created.

First off, the two sides got into an argument over procedure on who could and could not attend—with the committee chairman wanting it to be certain that Gov. McKeithen could attend if he had wanted to.

Secondly, the committee sharply re-

stricted the time allotted to the meeting by ending it to attend the legislative session and then declaring no more meetings would be held on such a basis.

Third, at a press conference Thursday afternoon Duplantier made it plain he felt Chandler was trying to use the committee as a vehicle for getting his information out to the public with immunity from suit. Duplantier said the committee would not be that vehicle.

'Explosive' Documents

Chandler's attorney, Cicero Sessions, described the documents turned over to the committee as "explosive." Duplantier said the committee would study them and then decide whether to make them public.

The whole series of events connected with the investigation, from the first decision to muzzle the citizen members, to the Thursday confrontation, have wrapped the probe in an atmosphere not conducive to winning the public's confidence.

It would seem that once the committee had been formed, its first effort would be to try to work with Chandler in a spirit of cooperation to uncover any organized crime influence on state government or local government.

Some avenue of communication was opened, but at the conference Thursday Chandler said it looked as though the committee did not want to hear what Life had to say.

Perhaps after the committee studies the information turned over to it, the counsel will be in a better position to ask Chandler questions about the allegations. It would also be in a better position to quiz other witnesses, including those police officials who already have testified about a lack of knowledge of organized crime in their areas.

Chairman Seems Determined

Further, the committee chairman seems determined to get Chandler under oath so he can be asked who are his sources of information. If he refuses, then the committee can seek a court order to compel him.

One can imagine now what the sources of information would then be from recrimination.

Duplantier announced that Chandler would be given a new subpoena after the 10-day truce has ended to appear July 14 at another hearing. At the same time, he revealed that Gov. McKeithen has been invited to speak under oath to the committee next Tuesday.

Duplantier has made a distinction of inviting some witnesses and subpoenaing others. A justification has been made that some public officials need not be subpoenaed.

It would seem that Chandler could have been invited to testify and bring his records and if the committee were not satisfied then he could have been subpoenaed.

There is no reason to believe that Duplantier is trying to do other than a good job of running the committee. There is certainly no reason to believe that a whitewash is being attempted.

But at the same time the whole tenor of the approach thus far has left the impression among many that that is where the investigation is headed.