

Interim Mafia Report

The interim report of the legislative committee formed to investigate charges of Mafia influence in state government provided no startling revelations on the subject.

The report, if anything, highlighted the futility of a legislative body trying to conduct a meaningful investigation amid the distractions of a 60-day fiscal session.

"It would be premature in the interim report to determine the truth or falsity of any of the allegations," remarked Sen. Adrian Duplantier of New Orleans, committee chairman. Indeed.

Nonetheless, the committee did not find it premature to attempt to discredit the only witness it has announced to date it intends to subpoena, namely, David Chandler, the Life magazine writer primarily responsible for the article which charged the Mafia exerts strong influence in Louisiana government.

Mr. Chandler, who had testified voluntarily before the committee with his attorneys, had refused to answer questions, the committee reported. Therefore, the committee has announced it will subpoena the writer to testify under oath at a July 14 public hearing.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chandler and Life magazine are targets of a law suit by the state administration, and

the constitutionality of the legislative committee has been challenged in another suit by the publishers of Life.

In singling out the Life writer for subpoena while declining to proclaim whether it intends to subpoena Carlos Marcello or any of the other principals named in the Life article, the legislative committee leaves the inescapable impression that it is more interested in discrediting the Life article and Mr. Chandler than getting to the facts about organized crime.

This may not be the case, but the committee leaves the impression nonetheless.

Meanwhile, special legislation aimed at undermining organized crime generally has had tough sledding in the Legislature.

To the committee's credit, it has announced that it is seeking the cooperation of the new Justice Department strike force, set up in New Orleans to investigate organized crime. The committee also acknowledged that several months may be required for it to competently fulfill its task. Final evaluation of the committee's work must, of course, wait until the committee proclaims itself finished. But it is fair to say that the public is not likely to be satisfied with anything less than a fair and objective investigation.