

22 SEPT

NEW ORLEANS STATES-ITEM

Mintz, Duffour Indicted in Bribery Case



AARON MINTZ

Furniture dealer Aaron Mintz, chairman of the Vieux Carre Commission, and another member of VCC, Rene J. Duffour, have been handed grand jury indictments charging them with public bribery. Mintz and Duffour were indicted jointly by the Orleans Parish Grand Jury last night for "receiving or offering to receive" \$2,000 from French Quarter property owner Sol Owens.

THE TWO VCC officials allegedly offered to give their approval to proposed improvements to Owens' property if he would pay them off.

Criminal District Court Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara set bond at \$2,500 for Mintz and \$1,500 for Duffour.

Owens reportedly testified voluntarily before the jury yesterday; he was not subpoenaed.

Duffour was arrested by the district attorney's office Monday after allegedly accepting \$2,000 from Owens, owner of an apartment building at 509 Bourbon. He was booked at that time with public bribery and corrupt influencing.

ASST. DIST. Atty. Julian Murray said Owens had informed the DA's office of the alleged bribe at the time it was made.

Murray said Duffour had promised Owens VCC approval of certain proposed improvements to Owens' building, which had originally been turned down by the commission as not in adherence to its regulations. Yesterday Murray said his office is accusing Mintz of "aiding and abetting" Duffour in agreeing to help him secure the commission's approval.

He said that Owens, while cooperating with the district attorney's office, asked Duffour for assurances that he could get the approval.

Murray said that Duffour arranged a phone call between Mintz and Owens in which the furniture executive assured Owens that together he and Duffour could successfully influence the vote.

"WITH THE promise that Mintz could swing the vote, we set up the payment," Murray stated.

Murray said there is corroborating evidence other than Owens' testimony and that, although his office has no plans for additional indictments at present, the investigation is not over yet.

Murray declined to say what the additional evidence might be. He credited DA investigators Kent Simms and George Eckert with developing and handling the case.

Following the indictment, which came at about 6:30 p. m., Aaron M. Kohn, managing director of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, was called before the jury. He spent about two hours with the jury before it adjourned at 9 p. m.

KOHN'S appearance was in connection with Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's newly launched probe into organized crime in New Orleans.

The investigation was prompted by a Life Magazine article which claimed racketeering is flourishing in the city. Kohn said he supplied the magazine with much of its information.

Emerging from the jury room, Kohn would not comment on what he had said in the secret chambers, but added the jury "may call me at some later date."

Also appearing at yesterday's session in connection with the crime probe were Police Supt. Joseph I. Giarrusso, vice squad

commander Lt. Frederick A. Soule Sr., French Quarter club owner Frank Caracci and former Garrison aide Pershing O. Gervais.

Court Hears Marcello's Venue Plea

Federal District Judge Frederick J. R. Heebe took under advisement today a request by Carlos Marcello to reconsider a ruling that Marcello's trial on charges of assaulting an FBI agent should be moved to another jurisdiction.

On Sept. 13, Judge Heebe granted a Marcello motion seeking a change of venue, but the following day his attorneys filed a motion asking reconsideration.

THEY contend that their position was misunderstood and that they did not intend

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pressing the motion for a change of venue.

Judge Heebe cited recent articles in Life magazine and statements of Gov. John J. McKeithen in granting the motion.

Arguments were heard today in which Jack Wasserman, Washington, D. C., one of the Marcello attorneys, claimed that the motion for reconsideration was prompted by his inability on Sept. 13 to convey the wishes of Marcello to the court.

"HE DOES not want a change of venue," Wasserman said. Judge Heebe asked, "was he here?" The attorney replied, "he was here, but he was not at the counsel table. He made known his wishes after we walked out of the court."

Wasserman added, "I confess I did not advise the court as clearly as I should have."

He said that Marcello really wanted to abandon the motion for change of venue.

U.S. Attorney Louis C. Lacour and Owen A. Neff, trial attorney for the Justice Department, submitted the matter without argument, but commented that Marcello was present at all times on Sept. 13, and no objection to the court's ruling was made until the following day.

Judge Heebe said that he was taking the matter under advisement because of the newness of the question.