

State Pulls All Stops on Probe of Organized Crime

There have been investigations before. Probes into charges that gambling dens, bookies' nests and bawdy houses exist—and are run by a criminal empire. Louisianians are used to crackdowns, and also are accustomed to the reopening of activity, after a brief halt has soothed the ruffled feathers of complaining citizens.

But now comes what must be the most wide-reaching investigation ever to probe the insides of alleged illegal activities in the Pelican state.

This "war on crime" is more serious than a simple bingo game or five-card stud in a smoke-filled back room.

LIFE MAGAZINE TOUCHED OFF the furor with two articles, and set the state afire with a third, all alleging that the rackets flourished under the nose of Gov. John J. McKeithen. The governor fired back that the articles were a deliberate "smear" of the state of Louisiana. However, the third article sent McKeithen scurrying off to New York

and returning to Baton Rouge with an apology to Life, saying the charges were well founded.

Two grand juries went into action, following a federal grand jury already probing another aspect of alleged crime influence.

The governor, on his return from New York, said, "We're going to clean up this state. You just sit back and see how fast we move."

McKeithen said Life convinced him that there was syndicate-type crime in Louisiana which could put "some big people in the penitentiary." The governor's apology to Life dismayed Orleans Parish Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, who continued his policy of saying there is no organized crime in his baliwick, the Crescent City.

LIFE'S ALLEGATIONS DID not come as a big surprise to many people. Cosa Nostra activity in South Louisiana, with the teeming city of New Orleans as a major port of entry into the United States, has long been suspected. However, Life gave specifics public officials could not ignore.

Central figures emerged as Carlos Marcello, a pudgy New Orleans rackets figure; Aubrey Young, a former McKeithen body guard now being treated for alcoholism; and D'Alton Smith, a New Orleans contractor.

Marcello, the governor said, was a man the federal government has been trying to put behind bars for years. McKeithen labeled Marcello his prime target.

YOUNG RESIGNED FROM THE governor's staff in July and earlier this month was committed to a state hospital for treatment of his drinking problem. Doctors allowed him to go on pass late last week long enough to testify before the East Baton Rouge Grand Jury.

And, by yesterday, two days after McKeithen's call to arms against the rackets, the most sensational development came. The grand jury that heard Young indicted Smith on a charge of public bribery involving a \$1-million attempt to buy ex-Teamsters Union boss James Hoffa's way out of prison.

Life told of a reported \$1-million bribery attempt to spring Hoffa. It said the underworld raised the money and gave it to Marcello to make a deal.

Alleged connections between Marcello and Young revolve around telephone calls Marcello reportedly made to Young at the governor's office and the first family's mansion. Dist. Atty. Sargent Pitcher of Baton Rouge said

Young admitted he had talked to Marcello on the telephone while still on McKeithen's staff.

Smith is accused of offering Young \$25,000 to influence Young to use his position to arrange a meeting between Smith and Edward G. Partin, Baton Rouge Teamster chief.

Partin, to Hoffa's surprise, turned state's evidence against the Teamster president at his jury tampering trial and Partin's testimony was instrumental in convicting Hoffa, who was sentenced to eight years in federal prison.

IN NEW ORLEANS, A FEDERAL GRAND jury is probing charges that Partin was offered \$1 million to change his testimony. Young confirmed that he had arranged the meeting between Smith and Partin but left at the first mention of Hoffa's name.

McKeithen, discussing the action of Young, an old friend and political ally, said, "the whole thing shocks me."

Young, he said, "was almost like a member of my family."

One result of the governor's fight has been a major new crime commission which will have as its main purpose the study of crime in Louisiana.

The question asked frequently is whether the new body will be able to get to the bottom of the situation. For one thing, it has no subpoena power.

M'KEITHEN IMMEDIATELY abandoned an old policy. "Our state police are going to take over the prosecution of gambling and prostitution in this state," he declared.

In the past, the governor relied on local officials to stamp out illegal activity. Only when it became notorious and local officials wouldn't react did the state step in.

McKeithen wasted no time suspending State Police Capt. Roland Coppola of Lafayette on the basis of Life's allegations that he associated with rackets figures.

The governor announced his move minutes after he landed in Louisiana from New York.

Coppola denied any wrong-doing but not his associations. He said mixing with such people was necessary to do his job as a police official.

THE GOVERNOR LAID DOWN his law to state police commanders at an urgent meeting in Baton Rouge Thursday. He said, in effect, either close up the illegal joints or lose your command.

He drew some lines, however. Church and civic sponsored bingo games would not be affected. Neither would poker games in which the "house" didn't get a share of the pot.

McKeithen's about-face on Life's crime charges threatened an old personal and political friendship with Dist. Atty. Garrison. The governor asked Garrison to end his feud with the New Orleans Metropolitan Crime Commission, which supplied information to Life.

Garrison replied hotly in a statement: "I am astonished by Gov. McKeithen's apology to Life magazine. I do not intend to apologize." And, he refused to mend fences with the crime commission.

Although the DA holds fast to his stand that organized crime doesn't exist in New Orleans, Garrison has ordered the parish grand jury to take a look into the allegations, hoping to settle the issue once and for all.

Yesterday the jury subpoenaed Marcello, who was out of town. He has been called again for next Thursday.

The big question now is to what extent organized crime flourishes today in Louisiana. The governor believes the state inherited the problem 30 or 40 years ago during prohibition.

Even bigger than whether organized crime is here, is the question, what will be done about breaking it?