

LOUISIANA-POLITICS

Scandal Not Apt to Hurt Governor

By **BILL LYNCH**
(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—Gov. John McKeithen considered buying an advertisement in Life magazine in a move to counter the adverse publicity heaped on Louisiana in the publication's series on organized crime.

The idea was to present the bright side of the state, the image of which had been badly mauled by the revelations that linked rackets figure Carlos Marcello to one of the governor's trusted aides, Aubrey Young.

There was to be no answer to the charges leveled in the stories, but only references to Louisiana's good points. A two-page spread at a cost of something like \$70,000 was being contemplated—with a good part of the funds to come from the tourist commission budget.

McKeithen said that some of his friends urged him to do this, but apparently wiser heads prevailed — chiefly that of Edward Stagg, executive director of the Council for a Better Louisiana, who was one of those with the governor at a meeting in New York with Life editors.

The implication obviously would have been an effort to curry favor with the magazine. Stagg, who served for a time as the governor's executive secretary while on leave from CABL, made his point and the idea was abandoned.

THE REVELATIONS OF gambling activity in the state are not something new. The gig that prodded the governor to action was the link revealed between his office and Marcello and the subsequent damage being done to the state's national image.

Newspapers in the state have at various times revealed operations of big time

gambling casinos — there were the Lakeshore in Vermilion Parish and Terry's Place in Laplace and others. Some have been closed, only to reopen a short time later.

The governor's attitude then was to enforce the law only when the operations became notorious.

Even now, the crackdown is limited to putting the lid on vice, with nothing being said about getting at the root causes.

Where vice flourishes in the form of gambling and prostitution it is a fairly safe assumption that corruption of public officials follows. There doesn't appear to be at this point any effort to root out the corrupted as well as the corruptors.

WHEN LIFE'S STORIES were first run, the governor was obviously more concerned with his and the state's image than getting at the truth of the charges. He was asked why it is that newspapers have no trouble finding gambling while state police do and he replied they were not looking for it.

Now they are out looking for it and there apparently has been a strong lid clamped on it in the state.

In East Baton Rouge the grand jury is probing the conversations between Young and Marcello, but the district attorney obviously is not overwhelmed so far by what Young disclosed to him about the calls.

A key outgrowth of the current situation is an abandonment of the long-standing state administration policy of home rule—let the local en-

forcement officers, the sheriffs and city police handle vice. This policy, except for an interruption by Francis Grevemberg, former head of the state police under Gov. Robert Kennon, has been in force for decades.

BEFORE abandoning that policy, McKeithen told Aaron Kohn, managing director of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, that adherence to home rule was strictly his personal belief. McKeithen absolved Col. Thomas Burbank, director of the Department of Public Safety, of any blame that might attach for failure to stop vice in the state.

He pointed his finger at Kohn, waved his arms and then pointed the fingers of both hands at himself — "Blame me," he said.

Despite all the furor and the reversal of his thoughts on the validity of organized crime's existence in the state, the governor probably will

come out of the current mire like the soap suds knight on a white horse.

IT IS A DIFFICULT situation for the governor, particularly so because it is an election year, but he has definitely taken the initiative and is not being placed in a position of having to defend his attitude. He says he was "dead wrong" and is now charging ahead to clean up the state.

If he had a more serious challenger to his mantle of governor than provided by the current candidates, McKeithen might be in trouble. But this is not the case.

Further, McKeithen is satisfied that the editors of Life have given him a personal clean bill of health and adds further that the sister magazine, Time, might just go ahead with that cover story it once planned but shelved at the last moment.



BILL LYNCH