

LOUISIANA POLITICS

Jury Head Key Figure In Rackets Probe Action

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

BATON ROUGE, La. — The grand jury that indicted three men in connection with unsolved bombings in the Baton Rouge area this week was something of a run-away jury — one that acts beyond the direction of the district attorney.

The jury acted on information that was presented by investigators for the State Labor-Management Commission at a private meeting to which both regular law enforcement officials and the foreman of the grand jury were invited.

As far as the Labor-Management Commission is concerned the grand jury foreman was the key individual in seeking action on the evidence staff members had collected incidental to its probe of labor racketeering in the area.

In the past few years there have been more than 25 unsolved bombings in the Baton Rouge area. To say that city police, the sheriff's department and the district attorney's office have been inept in this field thus far may be a mild understatement. At least, none of the agencies has demonstrated any ability to solve them.



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MANY OF THE BOMBINGS have had labor strife overtones and it was with this in mind that a chief investigator for the commission was prompted to say that a reign of terror exists in the state's capital.

It was the lack of accomplishment by local law officials that prompted the Labor-Management Commission to focus its efforts on the grand jury foreman directly.

It is further interesting to note that after the meeting between the labor-management staff and local lawmen, two key witnesses apparently refuted their previous testimony given to the state agency. However, both men were indicted for perjury since one or the other statement was not true. One man was indicted for participating in the bombing of a building that caused \$60,000 damage.

GOV. JOHN M'KEITHEN obviously isn't satisfied with the results of the East Baton Rouge grand jury's probe of organized crime which he asked for following national publicity that hurt the state and his image. He said he expects to receive a report from the district attorney or the grand jury members (even though that jury's term has expired)

and regardless of any legal prohibition there might be on disclosing testimony before grand juries.

After all, McKeithen pointed out, the state helped pay for the district attorney's investigation. He asked for it and the state's affairs are involved.

The only action taken in the grand jury investigation was the indictment of a man for offering a bribe to a public employe to arrange a meeting with a union official. The man is fighting extradition.

The district attorney, Sargent Pitcher, and the governor have not been political allies, although state labor leader Victor Bussie acting as a go-between has managed to bring them closer together. Pitcher feels that one purpose of the labor-management investigation is to involve him somehow.

Pitcher and Bussie have both conferred with the governor on several occasions since the Labor-Management Commission's probe began.

THE THREE DAYS OF PUBLIC hearings staged by the Labor-Management Commission this week merely scratched the surface, according to the governor. It concentrated on allegations of racketeering in Iberville Parish and implicated the sheriff and a state police sergeant who resigned from the force and left the state.

For the most part, however, the hearings were dull and mired in trivia after the initial disclosures attracted some interest. The platoons of Teamster Union members who filled the state Senate chamber the first day were noticeably absent the second and third days.

Testimony and interrogation dragged and obviously the commission's chief counsel William Redmann was ill prepared to handle the hearings. It was not necessarily his fault since he was brought into the job only recently and still must divide his duties as executive counsel to the governor.

THE COMMISSION FAILED to subpoena witnesses, some couldn't be found, some failed to show up and some were granted delays to prepare themselves to answer allegations made.

There are at least five construction firms involved in the commission probe and the first three days of hearings were confined to one single project. When the hearings are resumed Jan. 8, that single project will still be on the agenda. And the commission still hasn't moved into the Baton Rouge area yet.

Cecil Morgan, chairman of the commission, read something of a riot act in demanding that a more efficient job be done when the next hearings are held.