

**STATE DEMANDS REMOVAL
OF IBERVILLE SHERIFF OURSO
Extortion and Intimidation Charged**

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

BATON ROUGE—Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion today called for the ouster of Iberville Parish Sheriff Jessel M. Ourso. He filed a suit in 18th Judicial District Court charging the sheriff with extortion and intimidation.

The attorney general asked that Ourso be suspended from office during the removal proceedings, which developed out of the state Labor-Management Commission's investigation of labor racketeering in the Baton Rouge industrial area.

DISTRICT JUDGE DAN KIMBALL set a hearing for March 6 on the bid to suspend Ourso.

Ourso said in a statement that he would wait and study the allegations before making a reply.

"I would say, however, that I am not guilty of any wrongdoing in connection with the administration of the public office which I now hold. On the contrary, I have only attempted to the utmost of my ability to faithfully serve the people of this great parish."

OURSO WAS THE ONLY ONE named in the removal proceedings but charges against others are expected.

The suit also brought out the name of state Rep.-Elect Robert Freeman of Iberville, citing him as the recipient of an \$8,500 check from a pipeline construction company as part of a demand made by Ourso.

The suit declared, "for at least the past two years companies and individuals connected with construction work in the parish of Iberville have been subjected to a system of intimidation, harassment, favoritism and corruption unparalleled in the history of this state."

IT WAS CHARGED THAT THE condition "has existed with the knowledge, consent and participation of the defendant."

Ourso was accused of demanding payments from companies for labor peace, threatening bodily harm or death against individuals, forcing companies to hire a guard service he owned and rent equipment and hire personnel re designated.

Part of the accusations against Ourso were brought out during the first series of Labor-Management Commission hearings conducted last year.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL ACTED on information developed by the investigative staff of the Labor-Management Commission and his own staff of attorneys.

Turn to Page 18, Column 3

Continued from Front Page

The States-Item revealed last week the intention of Gremillion to bring the ouster action.

Under the state constitution, a sheriff may be removed from office through a suit filed in the district court where he resides. Gremillion personally filed the suit with the court in Plaquemine.

A hearing will be held to determine if Ourso is to be suspended from office during the proceeding.

The suit said that Ourso presided over a meeting with a representative of Natural Gas Construction Co., which was working on a project in Iberville Parish.

THE SHERIFF was accused of demanding that a former superintendent for the com-

pany be paid \$17,000 and be placed on the payroll at \$500 a week salary and \$105 a week expenses. The former superintendent was identified as Lionel E. Priest.

The suit said that on June 29, 1967, the day after the first meeting, the company president, Edgar B. Townes Jr., met with Ourso, Jimmy Morales, Teamster steward, and Rep. Freeman, who was present as an attorney. A list of agreements was reached including one that there would be no more labor trouble.

The company agreed to pay the \$17,000, which ostensibly was listed as payments for past work by Priest, and on July 14 sent two checks for \$8,500, each made payable to Priest and Freeman, both sent to Freeman at his office.

The previous May, the company paid \$164 for a set of five tires for the automobile of Ourso's wife, according to the suit.

The suit also went into Ourso's dealings with Lipsey, Inc., a pipeline construction company of Houston, whose troubles in the parish were the subject of the Labor-Commission's hearings.

Ourso was accused of threatening Tommy L. Lambeth, an employe, by telling him "If you want to fight I will whip you" and then calling a large Negro over and warning Lambeth and another employe that others did his fighting for him.

"It is clear that Ourso meant that he, Lambeth, would be injured or killed if there were any further trouble," the suit charged.

IT WAS ALSO noted that Lipsey Inc. was required to rent a bus from Morales and that the equipment never appeared, and that Lipsey was instructed to employ the sheriff's brother, Charles, and he never appeared.

The suit said that Ourso refused to cooperate in a theft case in which East Baton Rouge Parish sheriff's deputies were attempting to arrest a person in connection with stolen shotguns.

The sheriff questioned the suspects but refused to help the deputies and said the matter was under his jurisdiction.

Ourso recently testified under subpoena before the East Baton Rouge Parish Grand Jury.

In the recent shooting incident at a Plaquemine drainage project site, in which five persons were wounded, the sheriff was accused of misconduct in the handling of the case.

The suit said that Ourso was reluctant to serve warrants on six men charged in the case and invited them as guests to a fish fry he conducted behind the parish courthouse.

IN ANOTHER aspect of the charges, Ourso was accused of violating state law by permitting prisoners who were supposed to be in jail to work for private individuals.

The suit said that a trucking firm operated by J. P. Messina in Iberville Parish has prospered because of the sheriff's election to office. It said that persons were advised to hire the Messina trucks and said trucks were allowed to operate in the parish with impunity.

A wild incident involving the service of a subpoena on Ourso by investigators for the Labor-Management Commission was outlined in the suit.

Two investigators and a State Police sergeant went to Ourso's home last Dec. 18 and were told he was not there. The subpoena was left with his wife and as the investigators were leaving, Ourso came out of the house and stopped their car, raving at them.

One person with Ourso allegedly threatened the investigators, but was restrained.

Ourso was served the subpoena at that time.

In 1966, according to the suit, a construction company doing a job at Carville was approached by Ourso to employ his guard service. One night a truckload of lumber disappeared and sometime later a second truckload was stolen.

THE COMPANY, Badger Construction Co., decided when it brought in a \$20,000 load of wire to hire Ourso's guard service.

From Dec. 14, 1966, through Dec. 15, 1967, the company paid Ourso \$37,121 for the guard service, the suit said.

Gremillion said the sheriff violated the law in that the weapons and uniforms were the property of the sheriff's department.

A similar case was outlined with the employment of Ourso's guard service by the Fish Engineering and Construction Co.

Ourso was accused of threatening to commit "violent acts" against the Natural Gas Pipeline Construction Co. in the spring of 1967 because one of the people he had placed on the payroll had been fired.

The suit said Ourso called in Kenneth B. Bounds, vice-president of the firm, and said unless the man was rehired "he (Ourso) would commit violent acts against said company and more particularly stated, 'I don't give a damn about your office, about the people you have employed in that office."

"If you don't get it straight and keep me out of it I will blow that office and everybody in it sky high."

THE SUIT SAID Ourso threatened Harold J. Jarreau on Jan. 25, after the labor-management hearings were under way.

It said Ourso accused Jarreau of being a liar and "shooting off your mouth."

The suit said, "The sheriff then told Jarreau that a lot of people can get in trouble by talking; that nobody gets in his way.

"He pointed to Songy, chief of police of Plaquemine, and stated that if Songy got in his way he would cut him down, or even if his wife got in his way he would cut her

down to get what he wants. "Further, Ourso told Jarreau he played games to win and that he did not ever lose; he advised Jarreau to keep his mouth shut and go back to work or somebody was going to get hurt, and told Jarreau he had too much to lose because Jarreau had a family." Jarreau subsequently moved away.



—States-Item photo.
**SHERIFF
JESSEL M. OURSO**