

## BLAMES LITIGATION COST

# Ourso Resigns Office; Won't Seek Re-election

BATON ROUGE (AP)—The state's legal jousts to unseat Sheriff Jessel Ourso of rural Iberville Parish were over today—ended by Ourso's resignation under the weight of civil action and criminal charges.

The swarthy sheriff had been locked in litigation with the state for months, most of it stemming from labor relations in the parish.

HIS MOST recent court appearances dealt with an injunction barring him from taking his oath of office for a second term and the criminal charges.

They include malfeasance in office, bribery, theft and extortion.

In a statement released here yesterday through his attorney, Ourso said the financial burden of the court battles had become too heavy to bear. He pledged not to seek re-election.

The parish Democratic central committee was to meet at Plaquemine — Iberville's county seat down river from Baton Rouge—and consider a special election to fill the vacancy.

OURSO HAD been out of office since February when Gov. John McKeithen suspended him following an audit which showed his office accounts in arrears.

"I feel that it is now time for the parish to have a full-time sheriff and end uncertainties with reference to that

office," Ourso said in the statement issued by lawyer Sam D'Amico.

Ourso faces trial Aug. 1 on the malfeasance count and is scheduled to be arraigned Monday on the 32 other criminal charges.

D'Amico said he expected all proceedings against Ourso to be postponed indefinitely, including the civil removal suit and the criminal charges, all filed by state Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion.

"THIS OF course came as a complete surprise to me," Gremillion said when asked for comment.

"It was the primary aim of Gov. McKeithen and myself to have him removed from office and apparently this has been accomplished," he added.

Gremillion declined to comment on D'Amico's prediction of postponement.

"Insofar as the criminal charges are concerned," Gremillion said, "I cannot make a comment at this time because we have to reappraise

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the matter in view of the sheriff's statement."

THE ATTORNEY general added that no agreement existed or had been discussed to drop the charges in return for Ourso's resignation.

Gremillion had recently been granted a temporary injunction barring Ourso from taking office for his second term earlier this month.

The state's chief lawyer had claimed that the state police would be needed to maintain order if Ourso were allowed to begin the term which he won with an 80 per cent plurality.

The removal suit and criminal charges were generated by investigations prompted by testimony of coercion and corruption in labor relations aired before the Labor-Management Commission of Inquiry here last summer.

THE THEFT counts stemmed from payments made to Ourso by construction firms for a security guard service he operated.

The sheriff claimed the business was private, and thus the proceeds belonged to him and need not be paid into the sheriff's salary fund.

The extortion and bribery charges also grew from payments allegedly made to Ourso by firms on building projects in the parish.