

## Bail Bond Mess

Since 1966, the bail bond system, a device to free an untried defendant and at the same time make sure he appears for trial, has failed to function properly in New Orleans.

That is what a study by the States-Item shows.

During the period studied, more than 800 persons accused of serious crimes were arrested and charged. They were released on bond, then disappeared. Many have been caught committing other crimes. The whereabouts of many others still are unknown.

In short, during the past few years, hundreds of persons whom the bond system is designed to help have abused it.

There is, however, another very important aspect to the problem.

When a person fails to appear for trial, his bond is forfeited and the money goes to the office of the Orleans Parish district attorney. Such funds are used to finance the operation of the DA's office.

The DA's office, however, has been remiss in collecting these forfeitures. There is general agreement that more than \$800,000 in forfeited bonds have not been collected since 1966.

The worst offender is Maryland National Insurance Company. Since 1966, the States-Item study revealed, 563 Maryland clients have skipped out on their bonds while a total of \$720,775 in forfeitures has gone uncollected by the DA's office.

Who is to blame for the breakdown in the bail bond system here? Unfortunately, there isn't a simple answer. Many believe our entire system of criminal justice needs an overhaul. There is one certainty, however, and it is that the district attorney's office has failed to enforce the law in the collection of forfeited bonds.

Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison admits that failure to collect the forfeitures was a serious mistake for which he assumes full responsibility. At the same time, Mr. Garrison places the blame on Charles R. Ward, until recently, his chief assistant. Mr. Ward, the district attorney charges, dragged his feet in collecting the forfeitures while he (Garrison) was preoccupied with other matters.

Mr. Ward, who is opposing Mr.

Garrison for re-election, says the fault is the district attorney's. Mr. Ward says Mr. Garrison ordered him not to press too hard for collection, preferring instead to accept token monthly payments which, Mr. Ward alleges, the district attorney used to finance his investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Garrison has instituted court proceedings to recover the \$720,775 owed by Maryland. Moreover, he says he has appointed an assistant district attorney to set up a fool-proof system that will prevent a recurrence of the Maryland situation.

No system will be fool-proof, however, if those charged with enforcing it are remiss in their duties. It is not enough for Mr. Garrison to say he accepts full responsibility for the present situation and then pass the blame off on someone else. Had he devoted the proper attention to the operation of his office, the present situation never would have arisen.