

4 Feb 1970

Partin Testifies, Claims Immunity

Edward Grady Partin, controversial Baton Rouge Teamster leader, took the witness stand in federal court here today to support his claim federal authorities promised him immunity from prosecution in labor racketeering cases.

Partin testified before Federal Judge William D. Murray and said a U.S. attorney promised him immunity at a meeting in Nashville in October, 1968, in return for his cooperation in a case involving James L. Hoffa, former international Teamsters Union president now in federal prison.

PARTIN AND TED Dunham Jr., head of several Baton Rouge concrete products firms, were indicted last year by a federal grand jury on extortion and conspiracy charges in connection with an investigation by the state Labor Management Commission of Inquiry.

(In an earlier edition today, the States-Item incorrectly identified Ted Dunham Sr. as having been indicted in the case. Partin and Ted Dunham Jr. were the only ones indicted.)

Partin is seeking dismissal of the indictment on grounds of immunity. Today's court action was a hearing on the dismissal request and Partin was called by his attorney, Edward M. Baldin, as the first witness.

PARTIN SAID HE met with U.S. Attorney Gilbert Merritt in Nashville on Oct. 4, 1968, and was promised the immunity at that time.

The labor leader testified he talked to Merritt and several other federal officials in great detail about work stoppages in the Baton Rouge area and the work of the labor-management commission.

The indictments against Partin and Dunham stemmed from an accusation they coerced the purchase of products of Dunham's firms through threats of strikes and property damages in violation of antitrust laws.

JUDGE MURRAY, OF Butte, Mont., was assigned to the case after federal District Judge E. Gordon West of Baton Rouge recused himself.

Also to be conducted by Judge Murray is an evidentiary hearing on several other defense motions, including one for a change of venue.

VS STATES-ITE

5 Feb 1970

U.S. Hearing In Partin Case Is Resumed

Federal District Judge William D. Murray of Butte, Mont., today resumed hearing arguments here on technical motions filed on behalf of Baton Rouge Teamster leader Edward Grady Partin, under indictment for alleged antitrust law violations.

Late yesterday Gilbert Merritt, a former U.S. attorney at Nashville, Tenn., took the witness stand to declare that no promise of immunity from prosecution was made to Partin.

Partin himself testified earlier in the day that he was granted immunity at a meeting with U.S. Justice Department officials in Nashville in 1968. He is seeking dismissal of the charges on his claim of immunity.

IN RETURN, said Partin, he was to cooperate in a case involving James Hoffa, Teamsters international president, now serving a federal prison sentence. Partin was a government witness in Hoffa's conviction at Chattanooga, Tenn., for jury tampering.

Under cross-examination by Justice Department attorney Wilford Whitley, Partin would not answer directly when asked if he had been promised immunity from prosecution.

He answered, "In my opinion, yes . . . they said that I had nothing to worry about. That's why I testified."

Merritt testified neither he nor anyone else at his home

told Partin he would be immune from prosecution. At the meeting, he said, Partin was apprehensive about going before the grand jury the next day and he told Partin the purpose of the grand jury was not focused on him, that he was called as a witness, not as a subject.

THE FORMER prosecutor said he told Partin the Nashville grand jury had nothing to do with the Louisiana case.

Partin was indicted here, along with Ted Dunham Jr., and several Baton Rouge concrete firms which Dunham heads, allegedly for violating the antitrust and antiracketeering statutes in a conspiracy to coerce contractors to purchase products from Dunham's firms by strike threats and violence.

Baton Rouge City Judge William Hawk Daniels, another defense witness, said he was present at the meeting at Merritt's residence and that he described the Nashville grand jury investigation as a continuation of an investigation begun earlier in New Orleans.

THERE WAS a discussion of immunity but he could not remember the particulars, said Judge Daniels.

Michael Epstein, a Justice Department attorney, testified that at one time the Justice Department was investigating certain persons connected with the Labor Management Commission of Inquiry in connection with alleged efforts to get Partin to change his testimony in the Hoffa case. The testimony was instrumental in Hoffa's conviction.

Judge Murray was assigned to hear the case after Chief Judge E. Gordon West of Baton Rouge recused himself. Among motions now being heard is one for a change of venue, Partin claiming he cannot get a fair trial in Baton Rouge because of publicity surrounding the labor situation.