

# Gremillion LL&T Acquittal Sure to Have an Impact

By CHARLES ZEWE

Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion's acquittal on fraud and conspiracy charges had Louisiana politicians quietly jockeying today for new positions in this year's attorney general race.

"I'm running for re-election," said Gremillion yesterday, stepping from federal court flashing a victory sign and squinting his tear-redened eyes in the noon-day sun.

Minutes earlier a jury had found Gremillion, state Rep. Salvador Anzelmo and Arkansas businessman Ernest A. Bartlett Jr. innocent on charges stemming from the financial collapse of Louisiana Loan and Thrift Corp.

Gremillion's declaration that he would run for a fifth term as attorney general was being met today with both joy and anguish among politicians.

**BASICALLY**, there are two schools of thought on the political impact of yesterday's court verdict on this year's elections. One grouping of opinion says Gremillion is a "cinch for re-election," another says he is politically doomed.

"Gremillion's trial is not over, it's just moved," said one political observer. "The real jury will come in Nov. 6."

Despite completion of Gremillion's court "ordeal," at least temporarily (there are still five perjury counts pending), the attorney general's involvement with the tangled LL&T affair is sure to be a prime issue in his campaign for re-election.

"If anybody runs against him they can win," said one gubernatorial candidate.

"He's been made a martyr in the public eye and he's sure to be elected again," said another.

**BOTH MEN** seemed to represent the differing poles of public opinion on the rotund attorney general's political future, and both agreed if he is able to overcome the charges surrounding LL&T in the public eye and win reelection he

will have pulled off the political comeback of the decade.

Two candidates are running to succeed Gremillion. They agreed voters will ultimately decide Gremillion's "moral guilt or innocence" at the polls.

"It would be a sad commentary and sad point in the history of this state if to be found innocent of being a criminal constituted sufficient qualification to be attorney general," said Lafayette attorney J. Minos Simon, one of the two candidates.

"I respect the court decision but I feel confident voters will not let the verdict decide for them at the polls.

"He should have resigned voluntarily and, not having done so, it is my hope the people will join with me in retiring him by popular demand," Simon added.

Norco State Sen. George T. Oubre, another candidate, said he was glad the issue had been removed from the campaign.

"**MY REASON** for running all along is that I think I could do a better job as attorney general," he said. "Gremillion's guilt or innocence will have no particular impact. It will get the campaign back to his performance in office and not personalities."

For Jack Gremillion, he is faced with what will probably be his hardest race for reelection.

He was first elected to office in 1956 after the late Gov. Earl K. Long dug up an old state law which said that if a gubernatorial candidate won election on the first primary, other candidates for state office getting a majority of votes were automatically certified.

After a lengthy wrangle with the State Democratic Central Committee, Long won out and Gremillion took office. Since 1956, Gremillion has had the endorsements of virtually every gubernatorial candidate, including the backing of former Gov. Jimmie H. Davis and Gov. John J. McKeithen. That fact made campaigning easier for Gremillion, added

to his own popularity with voters because of his continuing legal scraps with the federal government over school desegregation and the tidelands.

**THIS YEAR**, however, things may be different. Polls show voters disgusted with state government and with "corruption" or shady dealings of any kind. Although Gremillion has been found legally innocent of fraud and conspiracy charges in court, voters will no doubt rehash the issue during the next six months.

Whether that's just or unjust is pointless . . . that's the breaks of the game," said one Baton Rouge politico.

Additionally, there are increasing signs this year's elections will see a true breakdown of Louisiana's traditional ticket system.

Gubernatorial candidates have in past elections made a practice of fielding lengthy slates of candidates for all state offices. This year, because of a close grouping of candidates in the governor's race, contenders are moving toward running without formalized tickets.

**A FIELD OF** independent candidates could force Gremillion to run on his own for the first time and for a "child of political fortune" as one observer described him, that could spell deep trouble.

"Who's going to endorse Gremillion with all the allegations flying around and the outcry for reform?" asked one state official.

A popularity poll taken shortly after Gremillion's indictment on the charges showed the attorney general to be the third most-disliked man in the state, ranking just behind former President Lyndon Johnson and Baton Rouge Teamster Boss Edward Grady Partin. He seemed to be more disliked in North Louisiana than South Louisiana, the poll showed.

"It's doubtful he's improved much on that position," said the man who took the poll, "but we'll know one way or the other in a few months."