

Letters to The States-Item

18 Jan 72

Questions Parish Prison editorial

Your editorial of Jan. 11 concerning conditions in the Orleans Parish Prison makes some accurate and worthwhile observations concerning the problem of medical treatment to the prisoners. However, your statement that between 80 per cent and 85 per cent of the inmates have not been convicted is not accurate.

I am quite sure that this error with regard to the percentage of inmates awaiting trial was unintended. I am equally certain, however, that you would like to have the correct figures with regard to inmates awaiting trial, on the one hand, and inmates who have been convicted and are serving time, on the other hand.

The Orleans Parish Prison, in addition to being a facility within which defendants await their trials, is also literally a prison within which persons convicted of misdemeanors and some felonies serve their sentences.

As of this date there are approximately 766 inmates in the Parish Prison, 515 of them have been convicted of offenses and are serving Parish Prison sentences as the result of their conviction. On the other hand, out of the total of 766 inmates, there are presently only 251 awaiting trial.

Consequently, instead of having a situation in which "80 per cent to 85 per cent" of the inmates are awaiting trial, in actuality only 32 per cent of the inmates of the Parish Prison are men who have not been convicted and are awaiting trial. Furthermore, the reason that most of the 32 per cent of the inmates are awaiting trial is because of continuances and postponements obtained in their behalf by their defense attorneys. This is not intended as a criticism of defense attorneys, inasmuch as their duty to their clients often times requires them to delay the actual trial as long as possible.

Furthermore, of the 251 inmates awaiting trial 127—approximately half of them

—have been in jail less than two months. This is in large measure due to the high priority given by the district attorney's office to cases wherein the defendant is incarcerated and awaiting trial.

Consequently, from the outset we made it a standing operating procedure to give the highest priority to getting incarcerated inmates to trial as soon as possible. We have succeeded in reducing the time of inmates awaiting trial from a year down to an average of 45 days, at most. We shall continue to do everything possible to alleviate the crowded conditions in Parish Prison.

Unfortunately, one of the ironies of the situation is that the more convictions we obtain the more persons end up sentenced to time in the Parish Prison. In that sense, we inadvertently contribute to the overcrowding—as witness the 515 convicted inmates out of the total of 766 men in the Parish Prison.

Your awareness and concern about the crowded conditions of this ancient and outmoded Parish Prison are laudable. When the change occurs bringing us a modern Parish Prison, the news media in large measure will be responsible for that change. The media have been effective in bringing to light the crowded conditions of the prison and its medieval inadequacy as a place for the incarceration of human beings.

Jim Garrison

District Attorney

Orleans Parish

Force for good

Pie Dufour's tribute to Miss Roseland Barry (The States-Item, Jan. 4) expresses, with his characteristic perceptive force, the essence of Miss Barry as a very vital contributive force to the New Orleans Opera House Association, and as a warm, vibrant human being.

As a former president of the Women's

Guild of that organization and as a personal friend of many years standing of Roseland, I was close enough to appreciate her warmhearted cooperation. She was truly "Miss New Orleans Opera," for she embodied within her lovely person—in her innermost heart—the very spirit of the opera itself.

Many are the hearts that are saddened because of her leaving us.

Mrs. Robert A. Laird

B.R. disturbance

With apprehension I have watched the news developments regarding the Baton Rouge disturbances.

The curious phenomenon that out-of-town agents provocateurs would pick on a state capital rather than the largest city, just before gubernatorial election keeps plaguing my mind.

The question is pure and simple. Who finances just the trips alone? The underprivileged militant minority can afford an expensive junket of violence such as that—immediately before an election—while some law-abiding citizens cannot afford a shopping cart. . . .

Nadine Heyer

Democrats and Louisiana

The recent action of the National Democratic Party in regard to the Louisiana delegation clearly shows the Democrats are not interested in the people of Louisiana but in the ideal of having a rubber stamp delegation along with their other rubber stamp delegations to select a Democratic president, who for all practical purposes will be chosen before the convention.

The Democrats don't want Louisiana, as testified by their actions. Obviously, we can be fools and act as their puppets, or show our intelligence and be independent, free-thinking Americans.

Melvin J. Burmaster Jr.