

# Rault Probers Refuse to Talk

Officials clamped a lid of secrecy on the investigation of the Rault Center fire today, refusing to discuss possible leads.

Fire Supt. Louis San Salvador insisted he had no knowledge of reports two kerosene cans were found on the burned-out 15th floor of the building. Four persons were killed Wednesday in the fire.

Richard J. Kernion, city chief administrative officer, said he would make no statements about the investigation. Investigating the fire are city police, the Fire Prevention Bureau and the state fire marshal's office.

Meanwhile, the two women who survived the plunge from the 15th floor remained in critical condition at Charity Hospital. A third survivor, who suf-

fered burns and smoke inhalation, was listed in fair condition.

**THEY ARE IN** Charity's intensive care unit and a spokesman said they likely will be there for some time.

The two who survived the plunge are Mrs. Wilma Williams, 26, 1724 Caffin Ave., and Mrs. Natalie Smith, 39, 528 Aurora, Metairie. Mrs. Williams remains unconscious, while Mrs. Smith has regained some consciousness and apparently is recognizing her family. Loyd Caldwell, 26, 2704 Whitney Place, Metairie, improved from "serious" to "fair" condition yesterday.

Three employes of firms in the Bank of New Orleans Building, who witnessed the fire from their offices, dis-

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puted a claim by a postal worker that a "human net" was organized to break the falls of the five women who plunged from the 15th floor to the roof of the Travelers Building eight floors below.

**THE POSTAL** employe, Matthew R. Johnson Jr., told newsmen Wednesday he and several other persons tried to catch the women and broke the falls of the two who still survive.

But newsmen found three persons yesterday who said they saw the sequence of events from the BNO building and that no one tried to break the women's falls.

One witness, Richard Richthofen, a draftsman, said the women could have been saved if firemen had placed a ladder on the Rampart Street side of the roof of the deMontluzin Building instead of the Traveler's Building.

San Salvador, however, said there was no time to get the equipment to that point, since it would have involved bringing it up six stories by hand. He said the equipment was too big to drag up an interior stairwell.

**THE FIRE** superintendent also said yesterday firemen working inside the building were only two rooms away from the women at the time they were

forced to jump.

He repeated earlier statements that nets to catch the women would not have helped and that an explosion touched off the blaze.