Use of Angola Inmates at Grand Isle Discussed

By C. M. HARGRODER
(times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

BATON ROUGE, La. — The public has been told that a new day was arriving at Angola, but Gov. John J. McKeithen’s comments on use of prisoners last week at Grand Isle go overboard. News stories revealed that 40 inmates of the state penitentiary were used to clean up the public beaches at Grand Isle. The governor says he “may have violated the law.” But he quickly adds that the work detail was a “volunteer” basis and he thought it was a good idea because it afforded prisoners a “vacation” with time off for swimming and fishing and doing their own cooking.

In the first place, there was no provision for Grand Isle or Jefferson Parish to foot the cost or pay the state for the services of the inmates — and there is a statute in Title 15, Revised Statutes, relating to the use of prisoners and for public contracts. In the second place, there are two distinct sections of the same title permitting the use, under certain conditions, of prisoners to work on parish roads in two of the 64 parishes — West Feliciana and Beauregard Parishes, the homes of Angola and Louisiana Correctional and Industrial School, respectively. In the absence of more general provisions for the outside use of prison labor, it must be presumed, that because there are express exceptions for the two parishes, that other outside public works are prohibited.

Public Objection

The governor argues that he twice before has done this — he used prisoners at Grand Isle for a hurricane cleanup, and again in Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes. Because there was no objection then he saw none now.

Again, the governor sees no objection because these were minimum security prisoners.

In rebuttal, the question must arise as to whether the Grand Isle vacationers were a select group. In other words, how widespread was the “invitation” to volunteer, and then now were the volunteers chosen?

In past years there has been considerable public objection to the use of prisoners for private gain. Trustees are permitted to work at State Police Headquarters and have been known to wash private cars, even paint and repair them on their own time.

Trusties have been used for years at the executive mansion. Once they were even found on the “pea patch” farm of Gov. Earl K. Long as far away as Winn Parish.

In less enlightened times in the history of Louisiana, inmates were even contracted to private industry as slave labor.

Gov. McKeithen might not be aware of it, but attorney McKeithen surely knows the law.

Triche in Fold

A whisper here and an action there, and politics is abloom in what surely history will recall as one of the weirdest campaigns yet in a state which has had its share. McKeithen, with no opposition in sight, is wheeling-dealing as if he had to repair political fences.

The move to absorb Assumption Parish Rep. Risley “Pappy” Triche into the McKeithen fold by making him a legislative lieutenant for the administration, was an overt act of support for an old opponent. Triche, who was a floor leader in the House for former Gov. Jimmie H. Davis, has survived the Long and Davis administrations. He now appears to have the blessing of McKeithen.

The Triche appointment follows on the heels of the takeover-capitulation of once candidate-for-Governor C. C. “Taddy” Aycock who seems destined for an unprecedented third term in the office of lieutenant governor.

Possible Candidates

There are reports as yet unconfirmed that Leander Perez Sr., high priest of segregation and master of all he surveys in Plaquemines Parish, will seek office as a state representative in the new district of Plaquemines-St. Bernard, foregoing the Senate seat occupied by E. W. Gravolet Jr. which includes the two parishes, but Wards One, Two and Three of Jefferson as well.

Perez is a great parliamentarian, and could well strangle the entire House in his maneuvers if he so chose.

Also still a whisper is the possible candidacy of House veteran Tom Jewell, Pointe Coupee Parish, a former House speaker, for treasurer. A. P. Tugwell, who has been treasurer since time almost remembereth not, has said he will run again. Whether the Jewell candidacy hinges on Tugwell’s is not known.

And to wrap it up, McKeithen is reported to have given his blessings to the House candidacy of former House Speaker Robert Angelle, a longtime Long supporter and once a House colleague of the governor. If so, McKeithen plans to swap one Angelle for another, Rep. J. Burton Angelle.

Which could be interpreted as McKeithen has rushed in where Angleles fear to tread.