



Richard Morehead

No 'Cover Up' According to Smith

Austin Bureau of The News

AUSTIN — Preston Smith wonders where John J. McKeithen, the governor of Louisiana, gets his information about the Texas press.

One of the best-read stories around the Texas governor's office last week was clipped from the State-Times of Baton Rouge, dated March 26, 1971.

McKEITHEN WAS discussing the bad press he is getting over alleged Mafia influences in the Louisiana state government.

We quote from the account of Don Buchanan, reporter for the State-Times: "McKeithen compared the Louisiana news media with the Texas news media in saying that the Texas press attempted to hush up questionable stock transactions involving Texas Gov. Preston Smith.

"McKeithen said Smith got \$150,000 in the deal (actually he shared a \$125,000 profit with Dr. Elmer Baum on purchase of National Bankers Life insurance stock)

Continuing the McKeithen account:
'Hound Me Out'

"If he (McKeithen) had been involved in such a matter in Louisiana the press here would try to 'hound me out of the state.'"

We do not know what Texas newspaper Gov. McKeithen has been reading, but Gov. Smith can assure him that the Tex-

as press hasn't attempted any "cover up" of the NBL stock-Sharpstown Bank loan transaction.

The fact is that our governor is tired of hearing about the story which broke on the day of his second term inauguration last January when U.S. Dist. Judge Sarah T. Hughes issued an order requested by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

THE INTERVENING six weeks has seen relations between Gov. Smith and the press, never robust, show signs of increasing strain.

The governor held one press conference after the NBL-Sharpstown State case broke, in which his business partnership with Dr. Baum was discussed. Since then, Smith's press "conferences" have been mostly hit-and-run affairs when reporters caught him after a bill-signing ceremony.

Lately, Smith has shown signs of

launching a counter-offensive. He has accepted two invitations to appear on television, and with the governor increasingly critical of press coverage of his administration.

Smith also is attacking others who keep the subject alive—U.S. district attorneys, Republicans and others.

MUCH OF THE criticism and demand for investigation has come from Democrats in the Legislature and elsewhere. Gov. McKeithen is a Democrat, a politician of long experience.

In his speech at Baton Rouge, McKeithen revealed how he plans to fight criticism from the press.

"One of the great games in Louisiana is to tree the governor," McKeithen was quoted, "I'm not thinking of being treed. I'm thinking about treeing somebody."

Tree Your Critics

This allegory will not be lost on hunters of raccoons or other tree-climbing animals. Neither will it be lost on experienced politician-watchers. One of the oldest political gimmicks is to "tree" your critics through counter-criticism. Many political candidates have chosen newspapers as their adversary, distracting attention from the real issues.

Anyway, Gov. McKeithen's comment brought laughter in the Texas governor's office, where humor has been in short supply these last few weeks.