

'Let the Courts Do Their Duty,' Boss Tom Says, "I Won't Squawk'

This sketch of Thomas J. Pendergast, Democratic boss of Kansas City, was drawn by Artist Thomas Hart Benton as a model for the likeness of Pendergast which will be included in the new \$16,000 mural the painter is completing in the lounge of the State House at Jefferson City. The politician will be shown seated on a platform from which a speaker is addressing a banquet group. To his left will be a scene of the Kansas City packing plants, and in the background a cabaret in which a pink-skirted dancer is entertaining. Benton made this sketch recently in Kansas City, where Pendergast is recuperating from a serious illness. (Townsend Godsey Photo.)

Copyright, 1936, by United Press. KANSAS CITY, Dec. 15.—Thomas J. Pendergast, whose Democratic organization is expected to be the chief object of a federal grand jury investigation into alleged fraudulent voting here, said today that he had been investigated so often that "one more doesn't bother me much."

"I've heard little except cries of fraud, fraud, fraud, in the forty-two years I've been in politics," Pendergast said in an interview.

"Just look over my record, and the record of the political organization you newspaper boys like to call 'Boss Tom's wicked outfit' and you'll find forty-two years of charges and not one conviction."

Pendergast granted the interview as the grand jury began its investigation of alleged election frauds. Fred Bellemere, Democratic chairman of the Board of Election Commissioners, was the first witness heard today.

The inquiry is being made on instructions of Judge Albert L. Reeves, who acted upon a request by United States District Attorney Maurice L. Milligan.

Other officials under subpoena are: George V. Aylward and M. A. O'Donnell, election commissioners;

Federal Judge Albert L. Reeves, who has instructed the grand jury at Kansas City to investigate alleged election frauds there. (Acme Photo.)

Charles A. Orr, secretary of the board, and V. J. Doherty, Hugh O'Rourke and Bruce Duncan, assistants.

Doesn't Know Details.

"I don't know upon what grounds Judge Reeves is basing this investigation," said

64-year-old Pendergast who recently left the hospital after a lengthy illness.

“I was in the hospital when the people voted November 3, and for the first time in twenty-five years I didn’t vote,” he said. “Tell me how I could know anything about what was going on at the polls.”

It was suggested that some of the organization lieutenants and workers might have made reports.

“Yeah, yeah, that’s just what all you reporters think and tell people. You think that I supervise every vote cast in Kansas City and the State of Missouri—and you probably think I had a hand in the German elections.

“I have no power or desire for power in the federal courts or any other courts. Anything the courts want to do is okay with me.”

Could it be deducted, then, Pendergast was asked, that he welcomed the investigation?

“Hell, no,” Pendergast shouted. “Who said anything about welcoming anything? Don’t you go trying to put things in my mouth.”

The political leader was asked if he knew of any instances where a charge of fraudulent registration or voting might be substantiated.

“Let Courts Do Their Duty.”

“There you go again!” he exclaimed. “Do you think if I knew of any fraud I wouldn’t stomp my foot on it, good and hard? If Judge Reeves and Milligan think they know of some fraud, I’m perfectly willing to have them substantiate a charge. Let the courts do their duty and they’ll never hear a squawk from me.

“There is a great wave of investigating. All the government boys are investigating everything they can think of and dream. I don’t mean that as any criticism of President Roosevelt. He’s not having anything to do with it.”

In view of the investigation Pendergast was asked whether he would defer his support of the election commissioners for reappointment.

“Hell, no, I won’t stop being for them,” he said. “That would be a fine come-off. Me turn against them just because they had been called before a grand jury. Weren’t the Republicans suppenaed, too? I wouldn’t have lasted long if I had turned against people every time someone pointed a finger at them. I don’t let my friends down.

“When charges are substantiated, then there will be some about-facing for me. I’ll be the first person to condemn anyone who is proven guilty of any unlawful activities.

“If I’d been proven guilty every time someone accused me of something, the courts would have been years behind their work getting me sentenced.

“Now Go Write Your Piece.”

“Now you go on and write your piece, and don't you ever try again to put words in my mouth.”

Two black trucks worked all night transferring to the grand jury chambers the ballot boxes, records, tallies and canceled ballots from sixteen precincts in five of Kansas City's sixteen wards.

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[page 2]

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City's sixteen wards.

The voting paraphernalia was subpoenaed, along with the four members of the election board and the three assistants of the board, within an hour after Judge Reeves instructed the jury to "reach for all, even if you find them in high authority."

Judge Reeves Is Threatened.

KANSAS CITY, Dec. 15.—(I. N. S.)—Federal Judge Albert L. Reeves, who ordered the grand jury probe of alleged election frauds, said today that he had received two telephone calls threatening him from a man who was extremely profane. "This is not a political move," Judge Reeves declared. "Ten Democrats to one Republican furnished the information which will be presented to the grand jury."

"G-men" are assisting in the investigation, it was revealed today, the Federal Bureau of Investigation having been occupied several days prior to the convening of the jury yesterday in attempting to verify information.