

Licensed financial institutions and otherwise legally constituted lending and credit companies, many of them within the framework of Small Business, are squeezed out of their lawful rates of interest when individuals and small business, in need of financial assistance, go to the juice gangster.

Small business engaged in the sale of consumer goods and services are denied income juice victims must pay in the form of high rates of interest.

The Illinois Crime Commission continues its investigation of the juice racket, started in 1965.

In 1966 we solved two armed robberies and successfully prosecuted several defendants. They needed the money to pay off their juice debts. We also arrested and convicted top juice gangster operators Willie Messino, George Bravos and their cohorts Joseph Lombardi and Sam Mercuiro on charges of aggravated kidnapping, battery and conspiracy committed before the criminal usury law was enacted.

My Chief Investigator, Mr. Robert J. Walker will testify before you today concerning Messino, et al, the horrible anatomy of a juice gang.

We held our first juice racket public hearings from January 14 through 16, 1966. We exposed, for the first time in Illinois, the nature and scope of this venal organized criminal activity.

Twelve juice victims testified in detail as did two of our own undercover agents. Thirteen suspected juice gangsters were subpoenaed but took the Fifth Amendment to a total of 1,026 questions.

We questioned these hostile witnesses concerning 16 gangland murders, crimes of arson, armed robbery, assault and battery, intimidation, kidnapping, torture, B-girls, vice, gambling, hijacking, counterfeit stock schemes, narcotics, embezzlement, income tax evasion and fraud, and a host of other organized criminal activities.

We discovered that many of the juice gangsters were engaged in a wide range of legitimate businesses, including, but not limited to, restaurants, restaurant supplies and services, trucking, juke box, vending machines, furniture distribution, household appliances, and others.

Some of the gangsters operated sales acceptance and factoring companies as covers for their juice operations.

Another 12 gangsters refused to comply with our subpoenas, contesting their validity and the validity of the Commission itself. They were Fiore "Fifi" Buccieri, his brother Frank Buccieri, Joseph Grieco, Joseph "Gags" Gagliano, two former Chicago Police officers Richard Cardi and Albert Sarno, Dominick Carzoli, Patsy Ricciardi, Pete Ori, Tony Spilotro, Lenny Patrick and Arthur "Boodie" Cowan.

We filed petitions with the Cook County Circuit Court in Chicago. The mobsters were to appear before our Commission. The court orders were appealed unsuccessfully to the Illinois Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to grant certiorari. In the interim Arthur "Boodie" Cowan was murdered in gangland fashion.

Eight of the 11 respondents finally appeared before our next public hearings on February 4, 1968, more than two years later. They too invoked the Fifth Amendment a total of several hundred times.

Albert Sarno, Chris Cardi and Patsy Ricciardi were the subjects of a court petition to grant them immunity from self-incrimination. We expect to file written arguments on or before April 22, 1968.

Three of the original 11 respondents, Fiore "Fifi" Bucciere, Joseph "Gags" Gagliano and Joseph Grieco, appeared before us on March 23, 1968 at our next public hearings. They too pleaded self-incrimination.

A very courageous widow, Mrs. ———, testified that Joseph Grieco gave her husband a \$300 loan. He was a full time employee of a local Chicago newspaper. Doctor and hospital bills depleted all his earnings. He was compelled to go to juice gangster Grieco for a \$500 loan.

Mr. ——— experienced frequent trouble in meeting the weekly 10% juice interest payments. One night he was dropped at his wife's doorstep badly beaten and bloody.

In May 1964, Grieco and two of his henchmen tried to kidnap Mrs. ——— 5 year old kindergarten son, Michael. His father was again overdue on his payments. Mrs. ——— frantically begged \$30 from her grocery store boss when a telephone call said she may never see her son again.

Another time she was told they would get her enough male customers so she could earn \$100 a day and thereby meet her husband's payments. Unfortunately, there is a 3 years statute of limitation on kidnapping.