

## Contract probers preparing case

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By Ray Richard  
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In a cluster of corner offices on the 21st floor of the John W. McCormack state office building on Beacon Hill, overlooking the waterfront, the state's newest crime commission quietly is preparing its assault on political corruption in Massachusetts.

Every day in these offices, sometimes into the night, lawyers, accountants, State Police detectives and experts on building construction read blueprints, scrutinize contracts and examine record books bearing the insignia of state and county agencies or the logos of private firms.

They are members of the staff which is investigating for the commission corruption in state and county government.

The commission is headed by Pres. John William Ward of Amherst College. It has received little publicity since it was formed, and prefers it that way — at least for now. But it is already gathering evidence which could produce more political upheaval — and cause more indictments — than the Crime Commission of the early 1960s, which led to the indictment of 96 persons on corruption charges.

Occasionally, as reportedly happened yesterday, prominent businessmen, some looking worried and accompanied by their lawyers, go into the new commission's offices or adjacent hearing rooms.

These people have been invited or subpoenaed to present information to the commission, which is named the special commission concerning state and county contracts.

The commission was established by the Legislature last spring as an outgrowth of the McKee-Berger-Mansueto scandal which had arisen from the con-

struction of the University of Massachusetts Boston campus in the early 1970s.

Its mandate is to continue that investigation, and much more.

It has orders to look into "the existence and extent of corrupt practices and maladministration" concerning any building contract issued by a state or county agency since Jan. 1, 1968.

That's a tall order. In that time more than one-half billion dollars — about \$77 million for this year alone — has been awarded for the building or renovation of prisons, hospitals, courthouses, office buildings and other facilities, according to records at the State Department of Administration and Finance.

They include \$130 million for the UMass Boston campus, \$60 million for the Middlesex County courthouse in Cambridge, and \$54 million for the University of Massachusetts medical school in Worcester.

The commission can investigate all such contracts as it seeks, according to the law which created it, not only evidence of corrupt practices but also of:

— "The existence of conditions which tend or may lead to the occurrence of said practices and maladministrations, and,

— "The existence of limitations on the powers and functions of those charged with the duty of approving, supervising or overseeing said contracts or with the enforcement of laws related to them."

"To start off, we are compiling a list of building projects by every state and county agency during the past 10 years," says Baneroff (Nick) Littlefield Jr., the 35-year old chief counsel of the commission, which sometimes is called the Blue Ribbon commission.

"We are feeding into a computer such information about each project as the name of the contractor, the bidding price, who awarded the contract, the change orders which were approved, what kind of maintenance record the building had. It's a long and tedious project. There has never been a list of these compiled before."

As results of this work, which is almost completed, task forces of staff workers and some of the 25 law student volunteers already is zeroing in on specific projects, agencies and private firms.

Some subpoenas already have been issued to persons to appear before the commission, although such appearances do not necessarily mean such persons are under suspicion of any wrongdoing.

"We just couldn't sit here and wait until somebody told us they knew of a contract that ought to be investigated," Littlefield said last week. "We are trying to study the universe to see what parts need to be investigated."

"We're trying to investigate why certain building contractors got more work than others, why some of them got away with shoddy work, why some buildings just don't work, such as the heating plant at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Imagine building a heating plant that doesn't work?"

Littlefield is a tall, trim, 35-year-old law instructor at Harvard Law School with thick curly hair, dark eyes, who likes to wear pinstripe suits, striped button-down shirts and a striped tie.

He is a former assistant US attorney who from 1972 to 1976 led investigations into fraud and white-collar crime in New York and New Jersey. He talks with a

firmness which indicates he means it when he discusses the commission, its role and procedures.

"The law which set us up provided us with the same secrecy as that given a grand jury, and we will abide by it," he said in an interview this week. "We will give out no public information about any private hearings we conduct. I will not even admit or deny if we have had any private hearings. We may have public hearings later, but only if we determine that they would serve a worthwhile purpose."

"We have a first-rate staff," he said. "Some are civil litigators, some are prosecutors some are people with construction backgrounds, some have experience as defense attorneys because we want input from defense lawyers, and some have financial backgrounds."

The law students, all volunteers, come from Harvard, Boston University, Boston College, Suffolk and New England law schools.

The staff needs help, Littlefield says. "We can use more volunteers, especially law students, accounting students, students interested in studying books and records, financial investigators and students interested in studying books and records."

And it needs the help of the public, he adds.

"It is very important to us," he said, "that the public know we are active and want any information about corruption in building contracts they may have. We will treat them on an anonymous basis. We need informants to go with our study of books and records."