

Waco Tribune-Herald

Sunday, August 4, 1985

EDITORIALS

Fezell-Scott feud alarming

The open belligerence between the Waco Police Department and the McLennan County District Attorney's Office threatens the very roots of the local criminal justice system. This is a shocking, unprecedented breach of public service that must be resolved, and the sooner the better.

Chief of Police Larry Scott is taking his felony complaints to the U.S. Attorney's Office, claiming that District Attorney Vic Fezell refuses to prosecute valid cases of criminal activity.

Fezell accuses the police department of using shoddy methods in gathering evidence and of failing to cooperate with his office.

The feud has smoldered for a year, but it caught fire when it was revealed that Fezell is under investigation by a federal grand jury in Austin for unspecified misconduct in office.

Fezell charges that the U.S. Department of Justice is retaliating against him because he embarrassed the Texas Rangers in his investigation of the Henry Lee Lucas serial murder case. Fezell claims that Jim Adams, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, Scott and City Manager David Smith are contributing to the plot against him.

We don't know who is right and who is wrong, but it is a sorry situation. The city's chief law enforcement officer and the county's chief prosecutor are publicly maligning each other, and the citizens are being ill-served.

There always has been room for differences of opinion between the city police department and the district attorney's office. There is a natural, not unhealthy variation of viewpoint between those who collect evidence and make arrests and those who rely on evidence to prosecute suspects. But we have never had anything like this. The system has broken down.

At the very best we have an unworkable criminal justice system that shows no sign of trying to heal itself. At worst, we have criminal activity in high places. It's hard to judge.

We do know that the current situation is intolerable and must be corrected. The people of Waco and McLennan County don't deserve this kind of treatment from their public officials.