Governor of Louisiana To Spare Inmate's Life

By PETER APPLEBOME
Special to the New York Times

BATON ROUGE, La., Aug. 16 — Gov. Buddy Roemer of Louisiana said today that he planned to commute the death sentence of a convicted murderer to life in prison without parole because of doubts that he had been properly tried for the case.

The prisoner, Ronald Morris, 35 years old, who was scheduled to die in the electric chair on Aug. 30, was convicted in 1960 of stabbing to death a neighbor, Lenora Collins, in 1957 as her terrified children looked on.

Governor Roemer said he was convinced that Mr. Morris was innocent, but that enough doubts had been raised that he was not prepared to go forward with the execution.

"Is There Any Doubt?"

"In an execution in this country, the test ought not to be reasonable doubt," the governor said. "The test ought to be there is any doubt.

"And I came to the very difficult conclusion that the Pardon Board did that, while I'm not the test for guilt, the test was that they were not convinced.

After a hearing last year, the Louisiana Pardon Board ruled it had not found a reasonable doubt that Mr. Morris's sentence be commuted to life. But it said its recommendation was based "on a deprivation of due pro cess of law as it appears to be present on Mr. Morris's guilt or innocence."

Governor Roemer read a summary of this conclusion after meeting with defense attorneys, the two victims' families, prosecutors and the victim's daughter.

The case has gained national attention because defendants and defense lawyers that another man, a former husband of Mrs. Collins, murdered her.

Twelve years after the crime, the killings of several other people, and with the testimony of defense and prosecution presenting two radically different views of the murder.

Witnesses Inself as Guilt

Despite the doubts raised by the case, the defense case remains one where the governor said he was at a loss for how to proceed. Mr. Roemer as the killer 10 years ago continue

But Roemer says the prisoner is guilty.

to insist that he was the killer.

Mrs. Collins, a 23-year-old mother, who was 23 years old, today told Mr. Roemer and his legal ad

visors they would be on trial for the crime of murder, that he was the man who killed her and her mother at their home in New Orleans. Her broth

er, Joseph, now in the Air Force, told the governor that he believed the murder was a solit

ence cell from South Korea.

Mr. Morris's case seemed unlikely to attract much attention after his con

viction, but in recent years, a definitive effort, largely financed by the New York law firm Paul, Weiss, Rif-

kind, Wharton & Garrison, has raised

serious questions about almost every element of the case.

The defense has marshaled a string of witnesses, many of whom are not in prison and who claim to have been there, and a new witness, another man may have committed

the crime.

So Morris was convicted in 1960 with killing his common-law wife, Erma Renee Loflin, in Pontiac, Mich., by stab

bing her repeatedly in the chest and neck. He was later convicted. His first wife, Maria Lewis Loo, has submitted an affidavit which she tried to have him to death in 1959, and the defense has presented affidavits alleging to another knife attack on Mr. Morris.

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