

Coroner Noguchi Quits in Feud With Hollinger

Will Leave Office
After He Testifies
at Trial of Sirhan

BY RAY ZEMAN
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Dr. Thomas Noguchi resigned Tuesday as chief county medical examiner and coroner.

The sudden resignation climaxed a bitter feud with L. S. Hollinger, the county's chief administrative officer.

Last Friday Dr. Noguchi said Hollinger had threatened to file "some type of charge" against him if he didn't quit.

Dr. Noguchi will become a pathologist in the county medical service at no reduction in salary. He is paid \$31,104 a year.

His resignation will take effect March 4.

Called in Sirhan Case

"I have been called to testify as county coroner in the Sirhan case," Noguchi said. He referred to his autopsy last year in the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

"I've decided, as soon as that is completed, to give up my position as coroner so that I can devote all my time and energies to the practice of forensic pathology in which I am specially trained," he said.

"The administrative duties of the coroner take up a lot of time that I should like to spend in my professional field.

"I am fortified in my decision by my knowledge that as coroner I have contributed to improvement of the office and its ability to serve the public."

Passes Out Copies of Letter

Dr. Noguchi passed out copies of his letter of resignation in the Hall of Administration press room just 20 minutes after the supervisors had adjourned their regular session at



Dr. Thomas Noguchi

Times photo

noon.

The board had intended to go into executive session to hear Hollinger's analysis of complaints against the coroner. It adjourned amid reports that Dr. Noguchi's resignation was imminent.

Last Friday Dr. Noguchi defended his record, including the autopsy in the Kennedy assassination.

Hollinger insisted he was not referring to the Kennedy death when he issued a statement that he

had received "a number of complaints and charges about the way Dr. Noguchi runs his office."

Dr. Noguchi, 42, had been coroner since Dec. 19, 1967.

He was appointed by a 3-2 vote of the supervisors after the UCLA and USC schools of medicine opposed the appointment. The schools contended he was too young and too inexperienced for the job.

The supervisors will choose his successor after a civil service examination.

Dr. Noguchi, Japanese-born, is a naturalized citizen. He is a graduate of the Nippon Medical School and served his internship in the Tokyo Imperial Hospital and the Orange County General Hospital.

Work Routine Criticized

Hollinger has complained that Dr. Noguchi spent too much time investigating routine deaths from natural causes and not enough on violent and suspicious cases.

He remained silent Tuesday about other complaints and charges he said he has received.

The compromise in transferring Dr. Noguchi averted publication of these charges and a long airing in civil service hearings.

Keeping Dr. Noguchi's salary at the same level when he transfers from the Coroner's Department to the Department of Hospitals will follow a county policy known as "Y-rating." This insures an employee against any cut in salary in an interdepartmental shift.