

# Noguchi Said He Wanted More Authority, Witness Testifies

Quotes Coroner as Declaring That 'We Will Take Over Riverside County, We Will Take Over Orange County'

BY RICHARD WEST

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Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi declared while coroner here that he wanted to expand the authority of his office over Riverside and Orange counties, the County Civil Service Commission hearing into Noguchi's dismissal was told Thursday.

"We will take over Riverside County, we will take over Orange County, we will take over the (Los Angeles County) public administrator's office," Charles Maxwell, chief of the mortuary division in the coroner's office, quoted Noguchi as saying.

Noguchi, Maxwell told the hearing in the new Hall of Records, said he had already established a foothold in Riverside County by getting Dr. Mitsunobu Toyama, a protege of his, a public medical post there.

Maxwell said Noguchi told him that if the county public administrator here objected to having his post taken over by the coroner, Noguchi "would make him a deputy."

## Question on Expression

Dept. County Counsel Martin Weekes asked Maxwell what Noguchi's "facial expression" was when he assertedly made these remarks late in 1968.

"It's very difficult to describe," Maxwell replied. "He looked hypnotized . . . very tired."

Weekes apparently was attempting to prove a charge by the Board of Supervisors that Noguchi claimed to be involved in a "forensic mafia" in which he would eventually be in charge of all coroner's cases "west of the Mississippi" while a pathologist friend of his "would take over everything east of the Mississippi."

On cross-examination, Noguchi's counsel, Godfrey Isaac, asked Maxwell if he would not describe Noguchi as a "fun-loving man."

"I don't know what Dr. Noguchi does for recreation, very honestly," Maxwell replied. But he did admit

that Noguchi "liked to joke at the office."

Isaac wanted to know whether pathologists and other medical examiner's personnel liked to crack macabre jokes around the coroner's office.

Maxwell said that their attitude was just the opposite, that they went out of their way to avoid giving the public the impression that they regarded a body as a "stiff."

The lawyer went on: "When Dr. Noguchi said, 'We need an airplane accident,' you didn't take him seriously, did you?"

"No, of course not," Maxwell said.

## Asks About 'Family Feeling'

Isaac asked that, while under Noguchi's leadership, there was not "a family-like feeling" around the morgue.

"I never felt 'family,'" Maxwell said. "I don't feel 'family' about the office now."

Earlier, an expert in forensic pathology from Chicago testified that the type of knife which Noguchi liked to carry on his belt while coroner is a useful tool for a pathologist to have in the field.

Noguchi assertedly once displayed the knife and said it could be used to perform autopsies on the county chief administrative officer and others—while they were still alive.

Dr. William Q. Sturner, assistant professor of pathology at the University of Chicago, said that he often had carried such a knife himself when he was a medical examiner in New York and Chicago.

For example, at the scene of fatal shootings, he said, the knife can be used to "recover a bullet immediately" so it can be passed on to ballistics experts.

And, Dr. Sturner pointed out, "not everyone dies in a naked state"—the

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way one might picture a victim lying in a morgue.

Often, many layers of clothing must be cut away before the autopsy surgeon can begin his work, the pathologist said.

Dr. Sturner testified that he first met Noguchi in 1964 at a convention of the American Academy of Forensic Science, of whose pathology and biology section Sturner is now chairman.

He said he last saw Noguchi at the academy's convention Feb. 28 and March 1 of this year, and was impressed by Noguchi's "phenomenal powers of concentration" and "absolute continuity of thought."

Sturner said he knew Noguchi was under "considerable duress" in his coroner's job but that he nevertheless showed a "high level of composure."

He said that he had never seen Noguchi take a pill or capsule or "make a bizarre statement."

Asked by Isaac if he ever had noticed Noguchi display any racial prejudice, the 34-year-old Sturner replied:

"Never, sir, never."

Sturner described Noguchi as "a warm, articulate, humane man, a leader in his community." The statement was ordered stricken from the record by Commission President O. Richard Capen as improper.

**Tells of Esteem**

The Chicagoan added that Noguchi was regarded with "the highest esteem by pathologists in this country and the rest of the world."

He said Noguchi in all ways lived up to the Latin motto carved over the door of the coroner's office in New York City, which translates, "Where death delights in teaching the living."

Sturner said Noguchi is now engaged in "a monumental project" of research for the Academy of Forensic Science.

In 1963, the pathologist

went on, Dr. Noguchi distinguished himself by preparing and presenting a seminar featuring "slides of unusual cases" which many pathologists never get a chance to see all their lives.

"How did Dr. Noguchi handle it?" Isaac asked.

"He spoke for an hour at a time on some cases" . . . in "excellent fashion," Sturner said.

Although the county is still presenting its case against Noguchi, Dr. Sturner was permitted to be called by Noguchi's attorney out of turn since he had to fly back to Chicago Thursday afternoon.

Weekes later called as a witness Mrs. Frances M. Sawyer, the widow of Lew-

is Sawyer, a Negro coroner's deputy whom Dr. Noguchi is accused of telling he would work "until he dropped." Sawyer died May 6.

Mrs. Sawyer, dressed in mourner's black and wearing dark glasses, testified that she read in a newspaper that Noguchi allegedly threw a pair of shoes at Sawyer and called him a "black bastard."

"I read it in the newspaper," Mrs. Sawyer said,

"and I said, 'Daddy, did he really say that to you?' And he said, 'Yes, he did.'"

Mrs. Sawyer said her husband, whom Dr. Noguchi used as a chauffeur, was injured in an automobile accident last Dec. 10, and had to stay home, wearing a brace, until Jan. 10.

She said Noguchi called Sawyer at home and told him "he (Noguchi) had a very busy schedule and for him to come in, and if

he couldn't he (Noguchi) would have to get somebody to replace him permanently."

Mrs. Sawyer admitted under cross-examination by Isaac that her husband told her he preferred driving for Dr. Noguchi over "pushing a pencil" in the office.

Isaac asked the widow if Sawyer had died of lung cancer.

"No, he did not," Mrs. Sawyer said. "He died of

blood clots in the lungs, and his lungs were too weak . . ."

Asked if it were not true that Dr. Noguchi had Sawyer promoted to the rank of deputy coroner, Mrs. Sawyer said this was only because her husband would then be "authorized to carry a gun and Dr. Noguchi wanted a body-guard."

The widow said her husband once had been a policeman.