

French accuse TV in Kennedy film row

**WE DIDN'T
KILL THE
PRESIDENT**

By GARRY JENKINS in London
and JAMES TOMLINS in Paris

TELEVISION journalism was on trial again last night after it emerged that three Frenchmen accused on screen of assassinating President Kennedy had officially-backed alibis.

At the time of the shooting in Dallas, Texas, in November 1963, two were in French prisons and the third was serving in the French navy, it was said.

One of the trio threatened a multi-million pound libel action and the programme's makers, Central TV, were engulfed in political fury.

MPs attacked the programme, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*, as 'worse than *Death on the Rock*', the controversial Thames TV film on the Gibraltar IRA killings.

Service

They also called for the removal of Central's ITV franchise and tough new laws, including a Government Ombudsman, to impose penalties on inaccurate broadcasters.

The three men accused in the two-hour documentary, shown at peak time on Tuesday, were all small-time Marseille criminals.

Police in France said that Lucien Sarti, accused in the film of firing the fatal rifle shot at the President, was in Fort Ha prison, Bordeaux, at the time.

The country's Ministry of Justice revealed that Roger Bocognani was in Baumettes prison in Marseille while the French navy said the third 'killer', Sauveur Pironti, who is still living in Marseille, was on military service on a minesweeper based at Toulon.

But despite the mounting evidence that they had gone horrifically wrong, Central TV and the

Turn to Page 2, Col. 6

INSIDE Weather 2 World Wide 10 Re



Pironti yesterday: 'Not me'

TV film

Continued from Page 1

programme's producer-director Nigel Turner refused to withdraw the programme's allegations that the Mafia plotted to kill Kennedy.

'We expected this,' said Turner. 'People have had 25 years to come up with alibis.'

Sarti died in Mexico in 1972 and Bocognani is now on the run from drug charges in South America. But Pironti yesterday pleaded his innocence.

'This is the most terrible moment of my life. It is wholly inexplicable,' he told the French newspaper *Le Provençal*.

'I agree that when I was younger I did things I should not have done. But I have paid for all that. I was never a killer for the Mafia or anybody.'

His lawyer J. C. Valera warned: 'We will sue for heavy damages, millions of pounds.'

They were backed by leading Marseille lawyer Jean-Louis Pelletier who attacked Central for not giving Pironti a chance to deny the allegations.

Franchise

'Why on earth didn't the makers of this documentary check further in Marseille? After all, Pironti's telephone number and address are in the directory,' he said.

Producer Nigel Turner said he did not confront Pironti because 'it would have been too dangerous'.

MPs attacked the programme. Harry Greenway, Tory MP for Ealing North said: 'This is worse than *Death on the Rock*. Central should not have their ITV franchise renewed.'

Terry Dicks, Tory MP for Hayes and Harlington, said: 'At the moment the TV current affairs media are making allegations without checking them. It has to stop because soon their reputation is going to be at rock bottom.'

John Gorst, MP for Hendon North and chairman of the Conservative backbench media committee, said there was now a case for a broadcasting Ombudsman.

'He would have the power to impose penalties on broadcasters in cases like this,' he added.

A U.S. expert on the Kennedy case denounced the film's claims that the Frenchmen — and not Lee Harvey Oswald — assassinated Kennedy. Dr Robert Blakey, who was chief counsel of a U.S. congressional investigation of the assassination, said the programme was irresponsible and medically incorrect.

Despite the storm ITV's controlling body, the IBA, backed the decision to clear the two-hour film. 'We insisted on a caption at the beginning saying this was not necessarily the definitive answer to the killing but otherwise we were satisfied with the film,' said a spokesman.