

An L.A. County Supervisor Asks 'Whether Sirhan Was Joined That Night In His Actions'

Candidate for California Governor Promises In Campaign to Hunt Down the Second Gunman

A crusading Los Angeles county supervisor wants to clear up the questions surrounding the assassination of Sen. Robert Kennedy and in so doing has made the long-dormant crime a political issue.

Now running for governor of California, Baxter Ward, 54, told TATTLEER he would name a special commission if he's elected to re-investigate the assassination.

In the meantime, Ward is planning public hearings to bring what he describes as undisclosed evidence before the public.

California Atty. Gen. Evelle Younger, who, as Los Angeles County district attorney, prosecuted Sirhan Sirhan in 1969, brushed off the Ward plan as a waste of time.

"It may be to his benefit temporarily to get involved in something like that but I don't see that the public interest will be served," Younger told a TATTLEER interviewer.

While Ward is running for the Democratic nomination for governor, Younger, a Republican, is himself running for re-election as state attorney general.

WARD, A FORMER veteran television newsmen who has created a storm during the two years he has been a Los Angeles county supervisor, said he expects evidence at a planned public hearing to show that three bullets used as evidence in Sirhan's trial do not match. These are bullets taken from Kennedy and surviving victim William Weisel and a bullet test-fired from Sirhan's gun.

"In Sen. Kennedy's death," Ward said, "there is no doubt that Sirhan was firing a weapon, and that eyewitnesses are convinced he is guilty. It is an easy, and perhaps logical, presumption that he acted alone. And there is no question but that he now is where he should

By VAUN WILMOTT
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be, in prison, for the rest of his natural life. "But despite the weight of all the testimony," the supervisor went on, "some of the physical evidence remains clouded. I am convinced that cloud should be removed. I do not know whether the results of such removal would confirm that Sirhan acted totally alone, or whether he was joined that night in his actions.

"But whatever the results might be, they should be determined and publicly announced."

AS GOVERNOR, Ward said, he would call on the California Legislature to help develop a commission that would inpanel a group of nationally-recognized ballistics experts to re-examine questioned evidence, re-fire the Sirhan weapon and compare its bullets with those submitted as evidence during the trial. Ward said his effort is the first major official attempt to get the evidence re-examined and re-tested.

But the County Board of Supervisors denied his request for the power to subpoena witnesses before his hearings.

Ward said the strongest resistance to his reopening the case has come from the district attorney's office and the Los Angeles Police



BAXTER WARD, left, who's seeking the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in California, is a veteran TV newsmen now serving on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. He's 52. "Despite the weight of all the testimony," he finds, "some of the physical evidence remains clouded. I am convinced that cloud should be removed." A Republican Rival, Evelle Younger, who prosecuted Sirhan and is again seeking the office of state attorney general, brushes off Ward's plan as 'a waste of time.'

Department.
As a Los Angeles newsmen, Ward said he was surprised in the late summer of 1971 that authorities would not conduct a complete re-examination of the ballistics evidence after a serious controversy erupted over the reliability of the Sirhan trial evidence.

AS COUNTY SUPERVISOR, Ward said he recognizes he does not have the authority to compel the district attorney to conduct such an investigation.

Ward noted some discrepancies in a 12-page

report the Los Angeles Police Department submitted Oct. 11, 1971, to justify its stand after a ballistics controversy had arisen.

Page 7 of the report states in part: "The statement that Sirhan was pinned on the steam table firing aimlessly is contrary to testimony ..."

On Page 10, in a discussion of how a bullet got into a ceiling tile, the report says in part: "...the slug that penetrated the ceiling tile was fired from a position that traced to the top of the steam table where Sirhan was observed firing. The steep upward trajectory of the shot that penetrated the ceiling tile would in all probability be a result of the struggle during Sirhan's apprehension."

"THE AUTHORITIES are confused on that point," Ward said, "so we don't know whether Sirhan was pinned down, firing aimlessly, or not."

Atty. Gen. Younger brushes off Ward's challenge with a statement that "it will serve no purpose."

"This ground has been plowed so many times before and, as you know, I said some years ago that this is going to keep cropping up," Younger said.

Younger described the Los Angeles Police Department's investigation as "the most complete criminal investigation ever conducted in history." A similar statement was made by Robert A. Houghton, who was chief of detectives at the time, in his book "Special Unit Senator" (the code name police gave to the Kennedy assassination probe). Random House contracted with Houghton to write the book shortly after Kennedy was killed.

"THE POLICE INTERVIEWED more than 4,000 witnesses and 65 were called by the district attorney of Los Angeles county to

testify during the trial," Younger said.

"And, at the end of the trial, testimony of 199 people who weren't called to testify was filed with the court. As a result of a request from the defense counsel, duplicates of 150 files containing interviews with potential witnesses were delivered on pre-trial discovery motions.

"Included among those files were recorded interviews with more than 70 persons who claimed to have observed the defendant at the time during the evening of June 4 and early morning of June 5 at the Ambassador."

Younger said police pursued many leads knowing they would be unproductive.

"But we resolved all doubts that we were getting the most complete possible explanation, looking to the day when somebody was going to claim ... you know ... this is some hanky-panky or this is a conspiracy.

"SO THE INEVITABLE occurred. It isn't surprising. We knew it was going to happen. It is the nature of the human animal, I guess. They don't like to believe a simple explanation like this one ... that it was just one man.

"It's much more fascinating to believe it was a conspiracy and others were involved and so you know it'll never be laid to rest."

The attorney general said the facts do not justify "any further circus-like hearings."

IF WARD'S EFFORTS lead to a court hearing, Younger said, "of course, we'll cooperate with it, but if we're just going to play fun and games ... You know they've been claiming new evidence ever since the day the jury came in."

"Some people have been writing books about the so-called new evidence," Younger added. "But just because people claim there is new evidence, that does not mean we are going to agree with them.

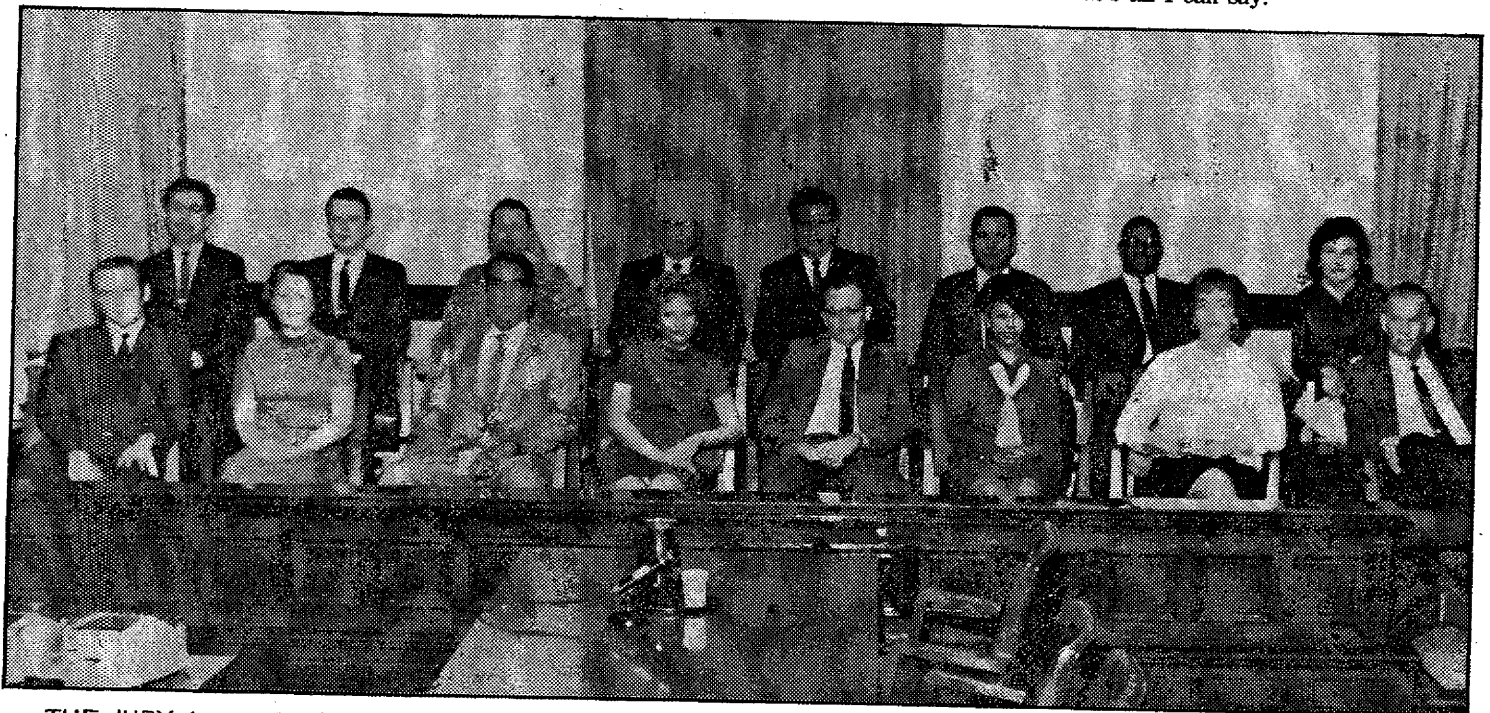
"But if anybody does in fact present any new evidence, I'd be the first to say the court should consider it."

Younger made it clear that answering questions about the Kennedy assassination arouses his impatience.

"I've wasted thousands of dollars of the taxpayers' money responding to questions I answered really in the court records and in the trial," he said.

"I think the jury performed their function; the court did, the district attorney did and the defense attorney did. And I think the results reflected what had occurred. So I have confidence in their verdict."

"That's all I can say."



THE JURY that convicted. Says prosecutor Evelle Younger. 'I think they performed their function ... I have confidence in their verdict'