

Officials Hesitant

Pittsburgh Press 1/9/77

House Takes 2nd Look At JFK-King Probe

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WASHINGTON — The House assassination investigation committee, created during last year's binge of congressional intelligence probes, is in trouble as lawmakers take long sober second looks at its plans.

On at least four separate fronts, critics are warning publicly and privately that the investigation of the killings of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. may do more harm than good unless kept under tight control.

Some top law-enforcement officials, conceding there are strong reasons to

believe the full story of King's killing has not been uncovered, are warning privately, however, that a poorly run probe may so "muddy the waters" that needed leads will be lost forever.

Congressional leaders are upset and some are fuming about the committee's request that it be given a \$13 million budget and a staff of 177 to continue its work two more years.

"Staggering," snapped House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, D-Mass., when he heard about the proposed budget. "I'm not going to comment on something that may not happen."

The special committee technically died with the last Congress. But it issued a year-end report saying it had uncovered promising and previously untouched leads in both the King and Kennedy cases.

It asked for the new budget, the staff boost, and two more years in which to work.

But formal approval was blocked after the 95th Congress convened when Republican Rep. Robert Bauman, Md., upset over the cost projections, asked that consideration be delayed for debate next week.

Bauman, a conservative, is getting unintended help from some House liberals who are upset over requests by

committee Chief Counsel Richard A. Sprague for surreptitious listening devices and statements that he intends to secretly tape and monitor some potential witnesses.

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Texas, who next week will become committee chairman, has backed off from Sprague's comments, saying he won't tolerate such practices.

But that statement came only after some House liberals strongly objected to Sprague's comments about the plans.

Sprague is the former Pennsylvania assistant district attorney who headed the investigation that finally brought the arrest and murder conviction of deposed United Mine Workers President W. A. (Tony) Boyle. Sprague says he wants the equipment to analyze taped testimony of witnesses with "psychological stress evaluators" to determine whether lies have been told.

The fourth major factor in the committee's difficulties, which few House members are willing to talk about but which is a growing concern among leaders of both parties, is the quality of some of the members of the assassination committee.

One Democratic congressman with a background as a prosecutor said yesterday:

"Nobody can discuss it openly, but that committee was created after the brouhaha about CIA and FBI spying last year. The Senate got all the publicity and the House blew its own investigation and we all knew it.

"So we went out and created this assassination investigation and put every conspiracy buff or anyone else who had to be involved for home-district political reasons on it. That may come back to haunt us.

"Most of the guys on that committee wouldn't know a conspiracy if they were involved in one," he said.