



CHIEF COUNSEL SPRAGUE SPEAKING TO HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

## INVESTIGATIONS

### Sprague's Sprawl

Amid a hubbub of carpenters, plasterers and electricians in the old FBI Annex below Capitol Hill, the newest congressional empire is abuilding. Before long it will have 30 attorneys, 50 investigators, 40 to 50 researchers, security men, assorted administrators and 30 or so secretaries. It will probably have a budget of more than \$6.5 million a year. It will also have a life expectancy of at least two years and at most ... well, no prudent actuary would dare to predict how long it may last.

The Select Committee on Assassinations was established last fall by the House of Representatives to make a fresh study of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. Despite a seemingly endless series of investigations, rumors, dark suspicions and public doubts persist about who actually shot Kennedy and King. Just last month a Gallup poll showed that 80% of the American people believe that both assassinations were conspiracies; some think the Mafia, the CIA, Cubans or other Communists killed Kennedy. Thus when retired Virginia Congressman Thomas Downing proposed that the assassinations be examined yet again, the House approved.

**Tough-Minded.** Incredibly, two men considered to head the investigation were Mark Lane, who has lived substantially for the past 13 years off writings and lectures attacking the Warren Commission, and Bernard Fensterwald Jr., who once represented James Earl Ray. Lane had the sense to bow out, but he recommended the man who was eventually appointed as the \$39,600-a-year chief sleuth: Richard A. Sprague, 51, a tough-minded former district attorney from Philadelphia.

When the new investigation was first discussed, an overall budget of perhaps

\$1 million was mentioned. Then Sprague began talking about \$5 million, and some Congressmen began to get fidgety; eventually most concluded that such a sum was not really unreasonable for so intricate an investigation. Finally, last month, Sprague proposed \$6.5 million—for just the first year—and the House Select Committee gulped. Nonetheless the committee unanimously approved the outlay, and the full House is expected to do so this month.

The princely sum covers salaries for Sprague's staff of 170, the lease or purchase of polygraph machines and copiers and the creation of a computerized cross-reference system for the thousands of documents the staff will sift through.

Some Congressmen remain skeptical. Democrat Andrew Jacobs Jr. of Indiana thinks the proposed budget is grotesquely swollen. Says Jacobs: "How unrealistic can this Government get? The difference between a \$13 million investigation and a \$500,000 investigation is that with the former, ways will somehow be found to waste \$12,500,000."

Nonetheless Sprague insists, "If we're going to do this at all, we've got to do it right." As a Philadelphia D.A., he won 69 convictions in 70 murder cases. He also sent United Mine Workers President W.A. ("Tony") Boyle to the slammer for plotting the brutal murder of his challenger for the union leadership, Joseph A. ("Jock") Yablonski and Yablonski's wife and daughter.

Sprague promises to bring the same tenacity and toughness to the new probe. He will not seek help from the FBI and the CIA on the grounds that both agencies may be tainted. "I'm willing to go wherever the investigations lead," he told TIME Correspondent Hays Gorey. "I'm under just as much obligation to disprove as to prove." Precisely where—if anywhere—yet another investigation may lead is open to serious question. All that is certain is that the hunt will cost \$13 million, for starters.