

Sprague Staff Blocked

WASHINGTON (AP)—The chairman of the House assassinations committee who is seeking to oust Richard Sprague as the panel's chief counsel has won the agreement of Atty. Gen. Griffin Bell to block Sprague's investigators from FBI files on the deaths of John F. Kennedy and Rev. Martin Luther King, congressional sources said yesterday.

Committee aides had been visiting FBI headquarters on a daily basis for the past several weeks to examine the files but were turned away yesterday morning, the sources said.

Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tex., met with Bell on Thursday before Gonzalez told a television interviewer that Sprague was a "prima donna" and later notified the lawyer that he was fired.

The future of the committee and its mission continued in limbo yesterday.

Sprague, instructed by the committee's 11 other members to stay on the

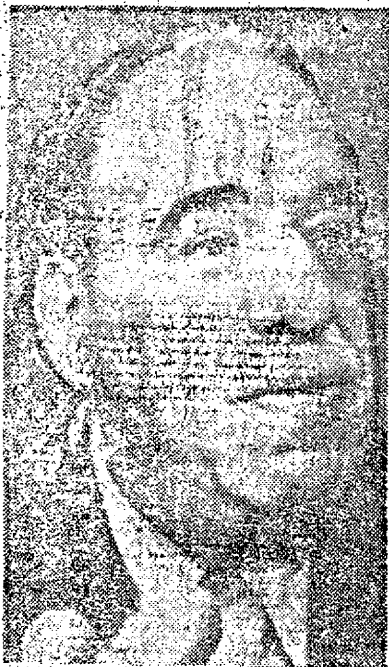
job despite Gonzalez' order firing him, returned to his office where, a committee spokesman said, he was working.

Sprague remained on the House payroll because House Administration committee Chairman Frank Thompson, D-N.J., said he was not signing Gonzalez' dismissal order.

Removal of any House employe requires the signature of his boss and of Thompson. Thompson said he will not sign the order unless the full committee fires Sprague.

Meanwhile Rep. John B. Anderson, R-Ill., chairman of the House Republican Conference, the third-ranking GOP post in the House, said he was pessimistic that the committee could survive the squabble.

Sprague and his aides were said to be concentrating on details of the committee's budget and procedures for probing the Kennedy and King slayings



HENRY GONZALEZ

From FBI Files

—both central issues in the dispute with Gonzalez.

The attorney was "keeping a low profile" and not granting interviews or issuing statements, committee officials said.

With the House in recess and the committee itself not scheduled to meet until next Wednesday, there was no indication of when, or how, the standoff might be resolved.

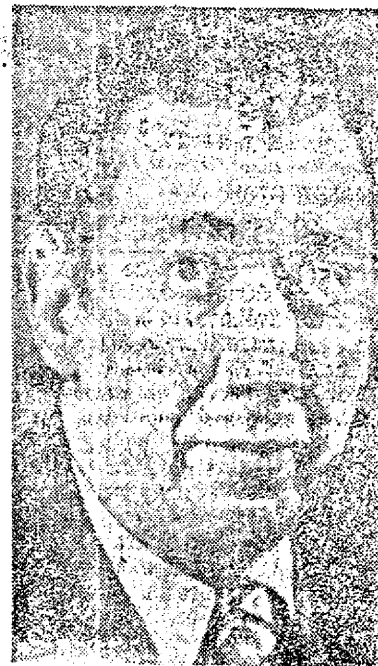
The dispute between Gonzalez and Sprague was the latest in the string of controversies that has plagued the select committee since its inception last year.

Sprague has been at the center of the turmoil since the beginning, first because of his demand for an annual operating budget of \$6.5-million that many House members thought was excessive, and later because of his proposals to use investigating methods that some considered improper.

Sprague, a flamboyant Pennsylvanian whose career as a prosecutor in that state also has been marked by controversy, had earned the wrath of many House members for his performance as chief counsel, but Gonzalez until recently had been among his defenders since taking over the chairmanship of the reconstituted committee this year.

Gonzalez is a nine-term congressman with a reputation for honesty and strong-mindedness—one published congressional guide calls him a man of "stubborn rectitude"—and some observers suggested it was only a matter of time until he and Sprague would have a confrontation.

What evidently caused Gonzalez' turnabout, however, was Sprague's resistance to a move by the chairman, earlier this week, to cut back on the size of the 73-member committee staff as an economy measure.



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