

Without a Chairman, Assassination Panel Adopts New Budget

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WASHINGTON, March 7—Fighting for its life, the House Assassinations Committee met today without its chairman and adopted a series of rules and an interim budget for its investigation into the deaths of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Nevertheless, Representative Richardson Preyer, the North Carolina Democrat who presided at today's meeting, said the chances of the committee's surviving beyond March 31 were "minimal."

The committee was established by the House last September. For the last few weeks its chairman, Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, Democrat of Texas, and the rest of the committee members have been battling over whether to dismiss or retain its controversial chief counsel, Richard A. Sprague.

Last week Mr. Gonzalez said Mr. Sprague was a "scoundrel" and submitted his resignation as chairman. The Speaker of the House, Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., said that he did not have the power to accept Mr. Gonzalez's resignation and that it would have to be acted upon by the House.

At today's meeting, the committee

voted itself the power to hire and discharge staff and approved yet another reduction in the salaries paid to more than half of the 70 staff members, so that the committee would not spend more than was authorized by the House.

The new cuts mean that 46 staff members will receive only 61 percent of their agreed-upon salaries for February and March.

The committee did not discuss Mr. Gonzalez's refusal to sign a pay voucher bearing Mr. Sprague's name, nor did it directly address the chairman's allegation that Mr. Sprague had violated House rules by continuing to practice law in Philadelphia and by refusing to prepare a new budget for the inquiry.

The committee, however, did adopt new rules restricting the inquiry's use of lie detectors, psychological stress evaluators and equipment to tape telephone conversations.

Under the rules, none of these devices can be used without the permission of the subject and, in some instances, of a majority of the committee. Another restriction would prohibit the public disclosure of either the results of any polygraph test or a witness's refusal to take such a test.

Representative Preyer said he hoped these restrictions, and a provision under which the committee said it would locate a lawyer for a witness unable to afford his own, would allay fears that the committee's investigators might violate the civil liberties of any person.