

# The Insider

Health food highs/Carter courts the court . . . sort of

## Seventies

### Killing the committee

When the House of Representatives voted on February 2 to give two more months of life to its beleaguered select committee investigating the assassinations of

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President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., many felt that the House was merely searching for an easy way to ease the committee out of existence. House Speaker Tip O'Neill went so far as to tell a Washington television audience on February 25 that, unless the committee produced proof of conspiracy by March 31, "the committee isn't going to be continued." Under the circumstances, this pronouncement by O'Neill was tantamount to a death sentence.

What began with the unilateral firing of chief counsel Richard A. Sprague by chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (a move blocked by the other 11 committee members) has grown into a running feud between the chairman and his committee, in which the Sprague matter has almost become a side issue. The eccentric Gonzalez, in defiance of the rest of the committee, has crippled the investigative capability of the staff, shutting off their access to FBI, CIA and Secret Service files and to long-distance telephone lines. At the last committee meeting, Gonzalez publicly accused committee member

Richardson Preyer (Dem.—N.C.) one of the most respected members of the House, of conspiring to take over the chairmanship. The committee adjourned over Gonzalez' objection and filed out of the chamber, leaving Gonzalez to rail against Sprague and the committee to an astonished press corps.

Finally, on March 2, Gonzalez offered his resignation as chairman, but O'Neill for the time being declined to submit the resignation to the House for approval.

Congress is acutely aware that it will be accused of covering up if the current probe is shut down. And it most certainly will inspire a backlash on the part of the Black Caucus, which was promised a reopening of the King case by the House leadership.

One conceivable face-saving scenario on the Kennedy case might be for the House to turn the entire matter over to the Senate Intelligence Committee which, *New Times* has confirmed, has quietly resurrected its investigation of the Kennedy assassination under the direction of Senator Gary Hart (Dem.—Colo.)

Such a move would hardly warm the hearts of critics, since the limited investigation conducted by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence under Hart and Senator Richard Schweiker (Rep.—Penn.) last year failed to review the key finding of the Warren Commission: that Lee Harvey Oswald had indeed killed the president. No physical evidence was examined.

The Schweiker-Hart report was extremely critical of the FBI's investigation of the assassination and found that relevant evidence dealing with CIA plots against Castro never found its way to the Warren Commission. But the Senate report leaned heavily toward an alleged Castro connection to Oswald while ignoring or glossing over evidence of Oswald links to American intelligence agencies. Evidence pointing toward involvement in the assassination by Cuban exiles, organized crime or other domestic groups was similarly given short shrift.

Critics also pointed out that to speculate about the possible forces behind the assassination without attempting to resolve the question of Oswald's guilt represented a clear case of putting the carriage before the horse.

The fact that Hart is directing the new Senate probe does not instill confidence that the new investigation will be any more thorough than the last. Despite the fact that the Senate committee's findings obviously spread a dark shadow over the entire Warren Commission investigation, Hart was widely quoted as being satisfied that Oswald had acted alone. He contended that the question still to be resolved was not whether he did it but rather why he did it.

With one congressional committee seemingly dead, barring a miracle, and with another of dubious intent gearing up, it seems more and more likely that the answers in the King and Kennedy cases will be a long time coming.

—Jerry Policoff