

Dr. King's Death Is Expected to Spur Rights Bill

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WASHINGTON, April 5—The slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. could assure passage of a landmark civil rights bill next week, Congressional leaders said today.

But they hedged their statements about the controversial measure with one provision—that there be no widespread violence across the country.

Some key House Republicans immediately called for prompt approval of the Senate-passed bill with its strong open housing provisions.

But even as they issued their urgent appeal, absenteeism on the House Rules Committee forced a three-day delay on final hearings on the bill.

Colmer Announcement

It was 11 A.M., a half-hour after the scheduled meeting time, when the committee chairman, William M. Colmer of Mississippi, walked into the ornate hearing room and announced:

"I am sorry to announce we are unable to muster a quorum today. We can't function without a quorum."

Only seven of the 15 members of the Rules Committee were present. Missing were two Republicans and six Democrats.

The heavy absenteeism, forcing delay of hearings until Monday, was viewed by some Congressional leaders as unfortunate at this particular time. They feared it might be interpreted as lack of interest in the civil rights issue.

However, the delay will not change the scheduled timetable under which the Administration hopes for Rules Committee clearance on Tuesday and House floor action on Wednesday.

The bill, passed by the Sen-

Leaders See House Passage Next Week Provided Nation Isn't Swept by Violence

ate last month, would strike down racial barriers in about 80 per cent of the nation's housing units, including millions of single-family homes.

It would also provide Federal protection for Negroes and civil rights workers; penalize those who incite riots or who manufacture or demonstrate use of firearms and incendiary devices intended for use in riots, and strengthen the rights of American Indians in their dealings with tribal councils, courts and various levels of government.

The murder of Dr. King prompted 21 House Republicans to release ahead of schedule an urgent appeal for passage of the rights bill. They had previously planned to issue the appeal next Monday.

'A New Urgency'

Dr. King's assassination, they said, had "given this matter a new urgency."

In supporting approval of the bill without change, the 21 Republicans split with their own House leaders. The House minority leader, Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, has urged that the bill be sent to conference with the Senate for possible softening of the open housing provisions.

A leader of the pro-civil rights Republican drive, Representative Charles E. Goodell of upstate New York, said that about 200 of the 434 members of the House were expected to vote for the bill.

The outcome, he said, will rest on about 50 others, both

Democrats and Republicans, "who could go either way."

Describing the situation as "very volatile," he expressed fear that "we could lose the whole ball game with a lot of violence around the country in the next few days."

Also urging prompt approval of the civil rights bill was Representative William M. McCulloch, Republican of Ohio, an architect of the civil rights compromise bills of 1964 and 1965.

Mr. McCulloch is the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, and his support of the rights bill is expected to influence the votes of some other Republicans.

Appeal by O'Hara

An urgent appeal for approval of the bill was also issued today by Representative James G. O'Hara of Michigan, chairman of the Democratic Study Group, an organization of about 140 House Democratic liberals.

"Even before the mindless murder of Dr. King," Mr. O'Hara said in a letter to House members, "this bill was recognized as one of the most important we would have before us this year. It now becomes even more urgent that it be approved."

Meanwhile, a chief opponent of the civil rights bill said today that he feared Dr. King's assassination might have hastened approval of the measure.

Mr. Colmer termed the shooting "a dastardly act." He continued:

"These dumb, would-be or self-styled patriots who commit this type of act are doing the cause they believe in a grave injustice and hastening the enactment of ill-advised legislation in a period of anger and emotion."