

Congress Roundup

Assassination Probers In Fight Over Sprague

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WASHINGTON—The future of Richard Sprague as chief counsel left the House assassinations committee embroiled today in an acrimonious tug-of-war between its defiant chairman and equally rebellious members.

Chairman Henry Gonzales, D-Tex., said yesterday he was firing Sprague "because of a consistent attempt to undermine my chairmanship and malign me personally" with the staff.

Gonzales ordered Sprague, a former assistant district attorney in Philadelphia, to clear out his desk by 5 p.m. or be removed forcibly by Capitol police, then left for his home district in Texas.

But all 11 committee members, spurning Gonzales' decision, declared the firing illegal and told Sprague to hold fast, that Gonzales had no authority for his move.

And Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill told the police not to evict the committee counsel as ordered.

Before leaving, Gonzales threatened to dissolve the committee formed to investigate the deaths of former President John Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

In a letter to House Rules Chairman James Delaney, D-N.Y., Gonzales said if attempts to resolve the problems fail, "I will not recommend that its life be continued beyond March 31"—the date the House set for the panel to justify itself.

Informed on arrival in San Antonio of his colleagues' action, Gonzales said "they're not the chairman. He (Sprague) can work for free. He is not going to work under the payroll." He said before leaving Washington he had told the chief clerk of the House to take Sprague off salary.

Sprague, Gonzales said, created "an intolerable situation" and "embarked on a calculated course of deceit, deception and divisiveness."

He declared: "It was either Mr. Sprague or the existence of the committee."

While Sprague—who planned to go to work as usual—hasn't said much on the dispute, his allies on the committee were quick to side with him.

Walter Fauntroy, District of Columbia congressional delegate, quickly contacted the 10 other members around the country to rally their support.

The members directed Sprague to "disregard Mr. Gonzales' order" and said "the entire committee, apart from the chairman, so directs you."



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