

Assassination Farce

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The proposed probe by the U.S. House of Representatives into the assassination of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has degenerated into such a farce that Congress should scrap the whole idea.

When the House voted last September to take another look at the two murders, there seemed to be merit in the move. After all, it came on the heels of disclosures that the FBI and CIA had withheld information from each other and from the Warren Commission's investigation of President Kennedy's death.

However, the grandly named House Select Committee on Assassinations has been sliding downhill from the start.

As chief counsel, it hired Richard Sprague, a controversial former prosecutor from Philadelphia, who promptly demanded a \$13-million budget for two years, a staff of 170 and hidden microphones and psychological stress evaluators to test the credibility of witnesses without their knowledge.

The House rightly found Mr Sprague's plans too costly and too ambitious and his proposed electronic

toys a threat to witnesses' civil rights. It extended the committee's life only until March 31, in hope that the committee would come up with a realistic budget and plan of operation in the meantime.

Now Mr. Sprague and the committee chairman, Rep. Henry Gonzales of Texas, have had a noisy falling-out. Mr. Gonzales has fired Mr. Sprague, and Mr. Sprague has got the other 11 members of the committee to tell him to ignore the chairman's dismissal.

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With this latest Keystone Cops caper, the committee has so discredited itself that it ought to go out of business. No sensible person is likely to place credence in any conclusion it might come up with.

A meticulous, unsensationalized investigation of the Kennedy and King slayings might have some value. It might convince some conspiracy theorists of what all the evidence indicates: That the assassinations were committed by Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray, each acting alone.

But after the Sprague-Gonzales mess, a House probe would convince nobody of anything — and thus would be without value.

The deaths of President Kennedy and Dr King were national tragedies, and we do not honor their memories by staggering on with a probe that has turned into a sick joke.