

House Panel Vows New

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Attempting nearly the impossible, the shattered House Assassination Committee hoped today to breathe new life into an investigation torn by internal dissent and in the midst of a growing skepticism in the House.

Members have scheduled a meeting today without the permission of their resigned chairman and in the presence of the chief counsel who has refused to be fired.

The only slim encouragement for the

troubled panel lay in promises of "new evidence" in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the reported willingness to testify by James Earl Ray, King's confessed killer.

Today's meeting was called Friday by six of the 11 members of the committee in a letter to Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Tex., who resigned as chairman last week in a bitter dispute over his firing of Richard Sprague as chief counsel and staff director.

The committee unanimously rejected Gonzalez' action as "illegal" and told Sprague to ignore it.

Gonzalez' own resignation has neither been accepted nor rejected. House Speaker Thomas O'Neill said only the full House has authority to do so.

The committee's letter to Gonzalez was addressed to him and said the meeting scheduled for today would be held with or without him.

Gonzalez fired back from his home

King Slay Evidence

at San Antonio that he could do nothing since he had resigned. But he was returning to Washington, still not saying whether he would attend the meeting.

Rep. Richardson Preyer of North Carolina, ranking Democrat on the committee, and comembers decided to go ahead and try to resolve some of the problems of the panel's five month existence.

These include unpaid phone and other bills; payments to 73 staff mem-

bers who have been off salary since January; an acceptable budget, and investigative and procedural rules.

Fearful that a disgusted House would veto a renewal of the committee's mandate which expires March 31, members last week began talking of "new evidence" and said three or more witnesses would be called to bolster speculation that Ray had help either before or after the King murder.

On Saturday, committee member

Walter Fauntroy, the Democratic delegate from the District of Columbia, said that Ray had written a letter from his prison cell that "he is willing to testify."

Ray, who will be 49 Thursday, is serving a 99-year sentence at Brushy Mountain Prison in Tennessee after pleading guilty to King's murder.

"We have every reason to believe the letter is authentic," Fauntroy said. "We have checked the signature."