



jake mc carthy

a personal opinion

Guyana Diary I

Mark Lane, the attorney who enjoys turning over rocks on the American soil to let the bugs crawl out, says the State Department knew 13 months in advance that the Rev. Jim Jones was serious about mass murder in Jonestown, Guyana.

Terri Buford, 26, formerly one of Jones' top aides, says that in October 1977, Jones threatened to kill the entire colony, which he had founded earlier that summer. But Jones was talked out of it by radio messages from militant leaders Huey Newton, Angela Davis and the American Indian Movement's Dennis Banks, all of whom Jones admired.

At the time, says Lane, Jones' radio broadcasts back to the states were being monitored daily by the Federal Communications Commission. Jones' knowledge of this inflamed his paranoia. And, says Lane, Jones had pleaded by radio with government authorities not to let U.S. Representative Leo J. Ryan of California come to Guyana on a fact-finding mission. Ryan and four members of his party were assassinated as they tried to leave, and the great disaster of Jonestown followed the same day, Nov. 18.

Lane was there. He was one of the few to leave alive. I talked with him by phone from Memphis the other day, where he has taken up residence while he is representing James Earl Ray in the case of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is this work, Lane believes, that saved his life in Jonestown.

Lane also represents Terri Buford, who is the chief witness in grand jury proceedings now taking place in San Francisco. She was in Lane's office when I called, and I spoke to her, too. Her life was spared because she fled from Jonestown two months before the end. Her life was threatened when she returned to America.

Lane says he had never heard of the Rev. Jim Jones or the Peoples Temple or Jonestown until last September, when he was invited to

visit Jonestown and deliver a lecture on the King assassination. Lane and Dick Gregory in 1977 had co-authored a book on the King murder, titled "Code Name 'Zorro.'"

Lane knew others who had visited Jonestown "and a colleague of mine had just come back and said it was interesting," he told me. "They said they had no money to pay me, but would send me a ticket. I went because it was just an intriguing idea to observe what they said was an experiment in communal life."

So Lane went and met Jones for the first time.

"The first thing that struck me was that the power structure in the organization was not very different from the United States. It was basically white middle-class professionals dominating a vast majority of poor blacks. It was more a reflection of American society than a rejection of it," Lane said.

Nevertheless, he went on, he detected a sense of panic on the part

of the Peoples Temple that the U.S. would destroy it. Jones had been told by a private investigator involved in Temple affairs that there were CIA agents in Jonestown and this, said Lane, "helped drive him over the edge."

On this first visit in September, said Lane, Jones told him that "they are trying to destroy us; they are working out a provocation in Georgetown (capital of Guyana) and probably in San Francisco as well." The Peoples Temple, Lane alleged, had already drawn up a "hit list" of enemies, and Jones, who apparently knew of the FCC monitoring, was convinced that the CIA had become involved.

Lane told Jones that he could file suit under the Freedom of Information Act to ascertain if this was true

"and he asked me to do that," said Lane.

"I was not planning to return there," he continued. "I was waiting for material when I received a call from Temple people in San Francisco saying that Ryan had sent a message to Jones that he was coming to Guyana.

"Jones said by radio that he didn't want Ryan to come. He saw this as the great provocation. He believed that, since he had set up a communist society in Jonestown, he would be subject to harassment by the FBI and the CIA if he were to return to the U.S."

According to Lane, Jones had sent a message early in 1978 "asking for assurances that if he came back to the U.S. he would not be harassed, and in return he would pull an Eldridge Cleaver, tour the country and denounce communism. But this project failed, and it was one of the reasons he was panicky."

Another reason, said Lane, is that Jonestown had failed as a communal experiment. "After heroically clearing a part of the jungle," Lane said, "they found they could grow almost nothing. They had to import rice. They had some cattle, but the grass had parasites and the cattle would die. They had to import food for their chickens. They couldn't feed themselves. It was costing them \$500,000 a year to keep it going and feed the people."

After Jones' overtures to the State Department had failed, said Lane, Jones began to negotiate with the Soviet Union and had met twice with the Soviet Embassy in Georgetown — not to take 1,000 Americans at once but to absorb them gradually as family units, after which the Americans could later leave the U.S.S.R. if they wished.

"But when Jones learned that Ryan was coming, accompanied by some of the most hostile parents of Jonestown residents, people who had filed many lawsuits, he saw this as the 'great provocation,'" said Lane. "By now he had been driven beyond paranoia and was heavily medicated. I begged Ryan not to go. I said, 'Jim Jones is ill and will see it as a provocation.'"

But Ryan went, and so did Lane. What Lane saw will be reported next time.