



The Thriller Scenario

A House Committee Asks Questions about the Kennedy and King Killings

BY ALFREDO LOPEZ

It's a fitting scenario for a paperback thriller. Two men, one a President, the other a prominent civil rights leader, have been killed. Two arrests have been made. The President's alleged killer dies, himself the victim of an assassin, before he can be brought to trial. The other arrestee confesses.

A Commission is named by the succeeding President. It reports that the dead man was the President's killer and that he acted alone. The confessed killer is sentenced to 99 years in jail.

A commission's report... a convicted killer. Everyone should be satisfied.

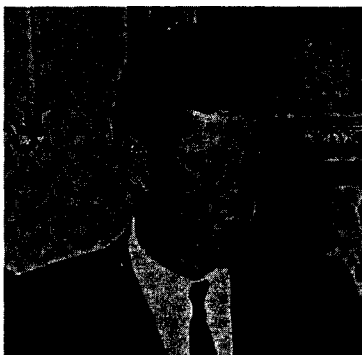
But everyone is not. For years, critics of the Warren Commission, established to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, have claimed that there are too many gaps, that Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's alleged murderer, could not have acted alone, that his sinister connections with the Central Intelligence Agency have never come to light.

Other critics, particularly lawyer Mark Lane, have had similar opinions about the Martin Luther King murder and the questions have intensified since convicted murderer James Earl Ray recanted his confession several years ago. In addition, recently released COINTELPRO documents reveal F.B.I. plans to harass and "neutralize" King.

But, for all the questioning and doubt, the Congress resisted reopening the investigations until two years ago when it formed a House Select Committee on Assassinations.

Since then, Committee Chairperson Louis Stokes (D.-Ohio), has led the group and its investigators through mountains of documents, the actual sites of the murders, hundreds of photographs and the testimony of "behind closed-door" witnesses. The members have been closed-mouthed about their findings but, apparently, there was something there because on August 14, the Committee opened public hearings on the two assassinations, beginning with the murder of Martin Luther King.

After hearing expert testimony that the fatal bullet had probably—but not neces-



Kennedy and King had the momentum to change the future. Investigations are now being reopened into the circumstances surrounding their death.

sarily—been fired from Ray's bathroom in a boarding house across the street, the Committee got down to brass tacks and called Ray himself.

In his deep Southern drawl, the man who is in jail for killing King, got to the point. "I did not kill Martin Luther King," he said. He then recounted the story he has told before: that he was trapped, after being befriended by a man whose name he spells Raoul and pronounces Raul, "a dark-skinned man, with reddish brown hair and a slight Spanish accent."

Ray's memory was sharp about where he went after the killing took place. He recited a long list of bars and brothels through the South and into Mexico. But his memory was vague when it came to where he'd been during the murder.

Although dramatic in itself, Ray's testimony was overshadowed by several pieces of information which have already been published.

Two months ago, a St. Louis man, Russell Byers, came forward to testify that he'd been offered \$50,000 to kill King by two former public officeholders, both of whom are dead. The Committee is now pursuing this highly publicized "link".

At the same time, and more importantly, as Attorney Mark Lane writes in the weekly *In These Times*, Grace Walden is now free. Walden is the only eyewitness to the flight of the King assassin. Seconds after the shooting, she saw a man emerge from the bathroom of the rooming house. Walden described him as relatively short, squat and dark-skinned.

When Memphis police sought Ray's extradition from England, they asked Walden to sign a document of identification. She looked at Ray's picture, refused to sign and said, "That's not the man I saw."

At the insistence of police, Walden was involuntarily committed to a mental institution for 10 years. The charge: "hallucinating that she was a witness to the death of Martin Luther King." Her records recommended that Walden should be "kept in the hospital until the Ray trial is over." Now she is out and her testimony will soon be heard.

In the simultaneous Kennedy investigation (hearings are scheduled to begin in September), the Committee has uncovered more startling information.

Several members of the Committee, including Stokes himself, are convinced that Oswald was not alone. One Stokes staffer even claims his boss believes in the "three assassin theory".

"We have a tape which shows that there were four shots, not the three the Warren Commission said. The Committee's experts are certain that one man could never shoot four times in such a short space of time. We believe that Oswald, possibly, and two other men were involved."

The Committee has also released several photos and one drawing. Committee members are unsure where the photos will take them but the drawing is of a man called "Maurice Bishop". Investigators believe that Bishop, who identified himself as an "intelligence agent", recruited

several Cuban exiles to murder Cuban leader Fidel Castro and, on one occasion, offered one exiled terrorist \$50,000 to kill President Kennedy.

It is this leader who has told investigative journalist Dick Russell that during one of his meetings with Bishop, a "young, nervous man" was present. "That man was Lee Oswald," he said, "which means that they were working together."

At this point, it's all speculation and even when proven, it would need the seal of

Congressional approval, inked by the Select Committee, to be nationally accepted. And that is another problem.

Large networks of "assassination experts" who have followed and even investigated the King and Kennedy murders and, in some cases, have provided much key information are not convinced that the Committee will do all it can. Says Russell, "Just how far they will go in implicating C.I.A. people, for example, is a real question."

Said another investigator, in Washing-

ton, "We're giving them the benefit of the doubt and supporting their efforts up to now but just imagine if the C.I.A. did kill Kennedy or the F.B.I. did kill King.... What do you think the impact would be on this country's government? Can a Congressional committee really allow that to happen? I have my doubts."

For now, a lot of eyes, skeptical and hopeful, are on the group of legislators who will be holding hearings until December on the two most publicized assassinations of the twentieth century. □

The Great Bailout: '78

They Did It Once with Lockheed; Apparently They'll Do It Again

BY FIELDING MCGEHEE

Back in 1971, the U.S. Congress was informed that Lockheed Aircraft, which was working on several Air Force contracts, was running over its budget by hundreds of millions of dollars and would be unable to finish the job.

Congress diagnosed the difficulty as "inflation" and prescribed the medicine: \$623 million to complete the work and the guarantee of \$250 million of a \$650 million loan. Lockheed was elated but, when word of the deal got out, public outcry was so sharp that Congress ended up passing an amendment to the law 80-804 which allows for government contract modification.

That 1973 amendment, which gives Congress 60 days to review (and reject) any contract modification in excess of \$25 million (overruns under \$25 million are frequent), is being tested this month for the first time. The Navy is about to pay \$931 million in contract overruns to two shipbuilding companies, General Dynamics and Litton Industries, unless Congress rejects the bailout. But that isn't likely to happen.

Senator John Stennis, Democrat of

Fielding McGehee, who is with the Military Audit Project in Washington, frequently reports on defense matters for Seven Days.

Mississippi, chairs the Armed Services Committee, the panel that oversees military programs and could review the contract settlement. He's also the head of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense which funds the programs approved by the Armed Services Committee.

But Stennis is, first of all, from Mississippi, where the largest employer is the Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton in Pascagoula. The settlement of the nine-year dispute over a contract to build five amphibious assault ships, called LHAs, will rescue that shipyard from financial disaster.

The contract signed in 1969 originally called for nine ships. But problems in hiring skilled labor and changes in the ship design resulted in delays and increased costs. Yet even with the number of LHA's cut in half, Ingalls is way over budget and years behind schedule. Only two ships are currently in service.

Litton charged that the Navy caused the delays and overruns, and filed claims for the extra costs. Unable to recoup the money after several years of wrangling, the company threatened to shut down the LHA line in 1976. The Navy went to court to force Litton to continue work on the contract, but the company's tactics eventually paid off.

In a January 18 letter to the chairman of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, Navy Secretary Graham Claytor said "the narrow and limited amendment to its contract with Ingalls Shipbuilding" was designed to guarantee "successful completion of the LHA program." The limited amendment will cost taxpayers \$447 million.

That is the amount the government will pay Litton above the \$1 billion contract price. In return, Litton will withdraw two suits against the Navy pending in the federal court of claims, and will absorb a \$200 million loss. Unless Congress rules otherwise, the bailout plan will take effect in late August.

The Litton settlement on June 20 came 10 days after the Navy's agreement to pay General Dynamics \$484 million over the contract price for attack submarines.

Under the new version of law 80-804, public hearings could be called to examine this but to date, no hearings have been scheduled.

As chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Stennis has the power to call hearings and would hold the gavel if any are held.

The problem is, he has found it hard to be objective about Litton's claims. "I share with most other Mississippians an intense pride in the outstanding shipbuilding program underway at Ingalls Shipbuilding," Stennis wrote in his 1976 annual report to his constituents. "Ingalls Shipbuilding and other privately-operated shipyards are great national assets, indispensable to our national defense."

Stennis took the lead that year in urging the appropriation of \$1.6 billion for claims settlements and Litton knows of Stennis' efforts on its behalf. Five weeks after he trumpeted his leadership role in the appropriation, the Litton Employees Political Assistance Committee (LEPAC) contributed to his general election campaign, in which he ran unopposed. LEPAC's offices are in Litton's corporate headquarters in Beverly Hills, California.

So, despite efforts by some Senators, such as William Proxmire, a longtime critic of corporate bailouts in general and of Litton's claims in particular who recently called upon the Senate Armed Services Committee to hold hearings on the shipbuilding settlements, a challenge is unlikely. As John Stennis told his constituents last year, "I will continue to lend my full support to providing funds necessary to build the Navy of the future.... Certainly Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula will play a significant role in this process." □