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Editorial

The Politics of Assassination

It was both wrong and unnecessary for the Los Angeles City Council to involve itself in the reopening of the Robert F. Kennedy assassination case.

Such inquiries do not belong in a political forum, where the opportunities for grandstanding could prove irresistible. They belong in the courts, where the rules of evidence—and responsible conduct—would prevail.

And it was just two weeks ago that the courts did take jurisdiction in the case. Robert F. Wenke, presiding judge of Superior Court, issued an order for the refiring of Sirhan Sirhan's gun and the reexamination of other ballistics evidence to determine if Sirhan was the only gunman in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel June 5, 1968.

But late last week, at the urging of freshman member Zev Yaroslavsky, the City Council got itself into the act by voting to form a special committee to review the Police Department's procedures in the Kennedy investigation.

What appears to concern Yaroslavsky most was the destruction by the police—a year after the assassination—of two ceiling panels from the pantry that were never introduced as evidence in Sirhan's trial. Those who believe in the "two-gun" theory argue that the location and characteristics of three

bullet holes in the panels would support their contention that Sirhan did not act alone.

But the panels no longer exist, except as a ready peg on which Yaroslavsky could hang his demand for a council investigation of police efficiency in an inquiry that took place seven years ago.

Why, then, a City Council investigation? Superior Court, which will examine *all* ballistics evidence in the case, is the more appropriate forum to examine police practices in the handling and disposal of the Kennedy evidence.

Mistakes did occur; there's no doubt of that, just as there is no doubt that the mistakes already have been brought to the attention of the public.

But Yaroslavsky, who has no more investigative expertise than the other four members of the council committee that will sit in judgment of the police, ignores all that has gone before in anticipation of the hoopla that lies ahead. If what he wants are more efficient police procedures in processing evidence, there are ways to accomplish that short of a public spectacle.

A year ago, when Supervisor Baxter Ward was urging his colleagues to launch a new investigation into Kennedy's murder, we said politicians should stay out of it—that it should be left to the courts.

We say it again.