

Nick Thimmesch

Mark Lane, Again

Part
12/5/78

The man does not know what restraint, grace or decent interval are. Mark Lane had scarcely arrived home after playing an off role in the Peoples Temple horror, when he was babbling on about a "master plan," a \$10-million secret fund, the possibility of more murders, and the negligence of the FBI and the CIA in preventing Jonestown's monumental grisly tragedy.

It was inevitable, I guess, that Lane would become involved. The man has won platform, large audience, transient congressional approval, and much money from his career of playing vulture around tragedies such as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King.

After surviving Jonestown, Lane is likely planning another book, laced with conspiratorial theory, and more years on the lecture and TV-radio talk circuit for his bucks. One must be Don Quixote to hope that he will be ignored.

Lane was hired by the late Rev. Jim Jones to pacify the late Rep. Leo J. Ryan and a team of accompanying journalists concerned that evil might indeed lurk in Jonestown.

Two weeks before that lamentable trip to Guyana, Lane wrote Ryan an intimidating letter about the jeopardies inherent in his mission. Lane charged that agencies of the U.S. government had "oppressed" the Peoples Temple, and warned that if "persecution" of Jones' sect continued, there would be "important consequences" and "a most embarrassing situation for the U.S. government."

Enroute to Jonestown, Lane told Ryan and his group that Jones and his true-believers were victims of sensational journalism and a mean U.S. government out to destroy this beautiful experiment in loving socialism.

Now, according to Lane's reconstruction in the press, he knew there had been suicide drills at Jonestown, that drugs and even drugged food was used to keep the believers in line, hence, he wouldn't eat the sandwiches offered, though he didn't warn the other visitors about them.

Lane claims he advised Ryan that Jones was sick and there might be trouble, but others aboard the plane say Lane didn't tell them, and some argue Lane should have spoken out. Lane counters by charging that the FBI and CIA had agents at Jonestown (both agencies deny this), although he offered no proof.

After Ryan and others were killed, and the situation became perilous, Lane was put under armed guard. Two of Jones' men came at Lane with guns and declared: "Mark, you are going to die. We'll all die. It's the struggle against fascism."

Since Lane discovers fascism in about everything which lives or breathes in the United States, this must have been a frightfully ironic moment. "How do we get out of here?" he replied, apparently forgetting the importance of the struggle.

It is just one excitement after another for Mark Lane. Only a few days before he went to Guyana, Lane was castigated by one of his former supporters, the Rev. Walter Fauntroy, D.C.'s delegate in Congress, as "a man who thrives on publicity—good or bad."

Fauntroy finally concluded, after hours of Lane's outrages during the assassination hearings, that, "Mr. Lane's repeated attempts to spitefully use the death of Dr. King . . . for his own purposes requires that I remain silent no more."

Though Lane was instrumental in getting Congress to investigate the murders of Kennedy and King, he wound up stinking up the hearings. He produced his client, King's killer, James Earl Ray, to tell a yarn which should have won him the permanent championship of the Liars' Club. Ultimately, Lane stormed out of the hearing room when asked to testify about a former mental patient whom he claimed was locked up for 10 years to keep her silent.

Alas, for a long time, Lane made paranoia and conspiracy theories respectable. His book on JFK's assassination was a best seller, and a fictionalized version became a flawed, but financially successful movie.

He saw Lee Harvey Oswald as a victim of a frame-up. He loves to defend Fidel Castro's Cuba. He went to communist Hungary to call for an international commission to probe Kennedy's death, which he has blamed on the CIA. Finally he turned to King, and wound up implicating the FBI in that assassination.

Now Lane has the Jonestown tragedy to play with. He will shout conspiracy, and blame it on fascist elements. The FBI plans to interview all survivors of Jonestown, including Lane, because it is charged by law with investigating any killing of a congressman. Lane will likely cry that he is being persecuted.

It is up to the media to ignore Mark Lane, but he probably will not be ignored. There is still appetite and reward money for those who can cry "wolf" the loudest.

©1978, Los Angeles Times Syndicate