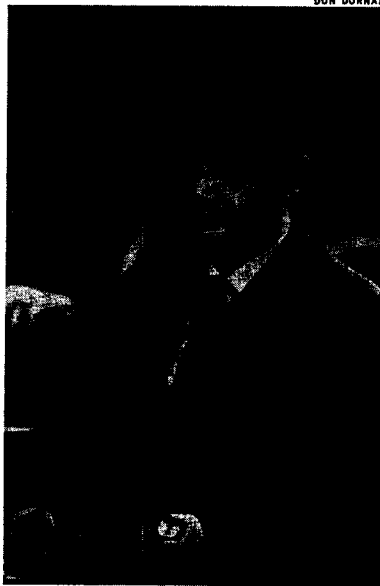


ty's board of supervisors. When the Civil Service Commission, sitting as a three-man trial board, took up the case, however, some of the charges were dropped, or were considerably watered down. Before the board of supervisors, for example, Lindon S. Hollinger, the county's chief administrative officer, and Counsel Martin Weekes alleged that Noguchi had said: "I hope Kennedy will die so I'll get to do the autopsy on him and a chance to make a reputation." In sworn testimony before the trial board, that quote became: "It seems Senator Kennedy is going to die. I'll be doing the autopsy." The charge had been made that Noguchi was glassy-eyed and "disassociated" during the Kennedy autopsy.

After six weeks of hearings, 600,000 words of testimony and a month's deliberation, the Civil Service Commission unanimously held that the county officials had not proved their case. Noguchi was completely exonerated and ordered reinstated immediately with full back pay (totaling \$12,960 at the rate of \$31,000 a year).

Last week, reinstated in the coroner's office, Noguchi ran into a personnel problem. One deputy medical examiner resigned; eleven other employees (out of a staff of 110) applied for transfers to other county agencies. Among them: the physician who had been acting coroner, two top administrative assistants, and Noguchi's own secretary.

## DRUGS



NOGUCHI AT HEARING  
A little too literally.

The trial board found that Noguchi had performed a "superior autopsy."

Several other sensational allegations were dropped. One was that Noguchi commonly ran around his office brandishing his favorite surgical knife and shouting "I'll kill him! I'll kill him!" about anyone with whom he happened to be angry. Another was that he had prayed that "a 727, loaded to capacity, would crash into International Hotel" so that he could be seen by the press, silhouetted against the flames.

J.U.S.T. Ads. Underlying the case, according to Noguchi's lawyer, was a personality clash between Hollinger and the coroner. Evidently, most of the allegations resulted from the fact that employees took Noguchi's graveyard humor seriously. The commission paid little heed to the charges because of the lack of supporting evidence.

Noguchi's supporters formed J.U.S.T. (Japanese United in Search for Truth), which took full-page ads in the Los Angeles papers to proclaim: "If this can happen to one of us, it can happen to one of you."

## CORONERS

### Examining the Examiner

The locale for the story was certainly a plausible one: Los Angeles, that well-known suburb of Hollywood. The leading character was Thomas T. Noguchi, 42, who graduated in 1951 from Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, migrated to California, and was licensed to practice there in 1955. For seven years he worked as an assistant to the Los Angeles county coroner, and in late 1967 was named coroner himself. Six months later, he performed the autopsy on Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Last spring, wild charges began to fly, so wild that Noguchi was summarily suspended from duty by the coun-