

Panorama, Friday, February 25, 1977

Guest: Speaker Tip O'Neill

Question: Mr. Speaker, Representative Gonzalez spoke to the press even before he said to any of the members of the committee that he intended to fire Richard Sprague as counsel on the House Select Committee on Assassinations. What do you think is going to happen about that? Do you think that he will back down?

O'Neill: I wish I had known he had said that to you, because I would have informed him very, very quickly that he did not have the authority. The authority to hire and fire goes with the committee. It does not go with the Chairman unless the committee were to delegate that power to the chairman. In this instance it did not do it and that is the dilemma we are in now. He has fired some of the staff and he had no authority to do it.

Question: In this morning's news, Mr. Speaker, it was reported that Mr. Gonzalez, the Chairman of the committee, is not issuing subpoenas as is customary for the Chairman of the Committee, and that he is not signing checks and that, therefore, for all practical purposes, the work of the staff is at a standstill.

O'Neill: Actually, I have assigned this to Jim Wright, the Majority Leader, principally because he comes from Texas and he is the second in the House and he can deal with Gonzalez as a much greater friend than I can.

Question: Does that mean that Gonzalez is off the track?

O'Neill: Well, we have the problems that you have stated that we have, there is no question about it. Jim sat down with Gonzalez's Administrative Assistant and with Sprague,-- they had lunch together to see where they were and how they could iron it out. Now Jim has not been able to get -- to talk to Gonzalez because Gonzalez is home with a deep bug of a flu and he has a temperature of 103-104. The doctor has ordered him not to get out of bed. The telephone is in the other room and Henry's wife has refused to allow him to get out of bed, but as far as the power of subpoena is concerned, there is no problem until next week. We hope that Henry is back next week. As far as the payroll is concerned, having checked with the Parliamentarian, it is my belief that a majority of the committee signing the vouchers, the people can get paid. They are going to get paid along the line.

Question: In the meantime, what is going to happen with this committee. There has been a suggestion that this is a "good old boy" vote. That the authorization for the budget being extended two months is merely a way of saving face and that this whole committee, the Assassination committee, is going to be buried.

O'Neill: Well, to be perfectly truthful, unless they come up with something of a sensational nature, the chances are that the committee will go out of business at the end of March.

Question: How are they going to do that without the money?

O'Neill: George, they will have the money. No question about the money -- the money through March.

Question: You mean the \$86,000?

O'Neill: The \$84,000 a month. They can get that. As I said if Henry Gonzalez was to fail to do it, a majority of the committee signing the budget would get it.

Question: But Sprague wanted something in the neighborhood of four times that per month.

O'Neill: Of course, he is only getting \$84,000 a month through March. Now they have to come back in March and justify what they have done. Some of the members say there is a tremendous breakthrough on the King case. I don't want to say the conversation I have had with members of the committee, but they say they are on the verge of a breakthrough. If they are on the verge of a breakthrough, and if within the next month there is evidence of a nature--I would have to say almost sensational in nature, then the committee will be continued and if there isn't, then the committee isn't going to be continued.

Question: Would you say because of the inter--?

O'Neill: Because of the intercommittee squabble.

Question: When you say sensational in nature, do you mean conclusory--Ray did not act alone--

O'Neill: Yes, that is exactly what I mean.

Question: -- or there are indications that they may have been somebody else?

O'Neill: No, I would have to say that they would have to have evidence that there is some kind of a conspiracy.

Question: The Attorney General today was quoted as saying that he would really like to have the Department of Justice re-interview Ray, but Ray has declined to be interviewed by the Department of

Justice, and the Department of Justice was not going to try to re-interview him as long as the committee was in session, that is the Assassination Committee. Have you had any consultation with Mr. Bell on that subject?

O'Neill: George, you are talking about the man who wrote the book . . . the answer is that I have not talked to Bell. This is in the hands of the committee. The answer is that we are trying to iron out the problems of a committee and other than the fact that we have been told that they are on the threshold of a break in the case, I know nothing about it. Okay?

Question: Okay, let's talk about something you do know something about.

3/5/77

Mr. James Earl Ray, 65477
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Dear Jimmy,

Yesterday I was in Washington on an FOIA matter having nothing to do with you.

When I was there I arranged to obtain a partial transcript of the 2/25/77 appearance of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, on a local Washington talk show called Panorama.

I'm sure you know enough about O'Neill and that he is the No. 1 man in the House.

I can't take time for all of it but I am again trying to get you to distinguish between what you wish were true and what the realities are. What I will take time for says as explicitly as one could need that the committee, including the Members, has decided that you are the assassin and the only question is were you alone or did you have help.

"He says, I am sure meaning all the blacks and some of the whites, that:

"Some of the members say there is a tremendous breakthrough on the King case. I don't want to say the conversation I had with members of the committee, but they say they are on the verge of a breakthrough, and if within the next month there is evidence of a nature -- I would have to say almost sensational in nature, ~~and it is~~ then the committee will be continued..."

He is then asked, "Question: When you say sensational in nature, do you mean conclusory -- that Ray did not act alone --

"O'Neill, Yes that is exactly what I mean.

"Question-- or there ^{are} were indications that there may have been someone else?"

O'Neill says "No" and that "I would have to say that" what the committee is telling him is that you were the shooter and their "breakthrough" and "sensation" is help to you in your killing of King.

If you think that you can turn these characters around when they have the evidentiary hearing transcripts and have read them you are out of your mind.

Since I last wrote you people who are outraged have sent me tapes of two more of Lane's appearances. With the position you have taken I'm telling you nothing about what he said except that with him as a friend enemies are wasted on you.

Hurriedly,

Arnold Weisberg