

Slayings Panel Calls a Hearing, but Mum's the Word

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The embattled House Assassinations Committee has adopted such a low profile that it is now even getting hard to find.

Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, and the rest of the panel are making a deliberate effort to develop a new and less controversial image, but they may have gone a mile too far.

This is what happened and it tells a lot about what the trouble-plagued

committee's operations are like now:

The committee scheduled an open hearing and reporters spent several hours the night before and yesterday morning trying to find out what the meeting was about. The offices of five committee members didn't know; D.C. Delegate Walter E. Fauntroy's office didn't answer the phone up to five minutes before the meeting and staff aides reached at committee staff headquarters professed not to know.

But where are Durt Chardak and Ty Roberts, the two press spokespersons for the committee, a reporter asked a staffer? They don't work here anymore, said the employe. Who answers press queries then? Two researchers. What are their names? The aide said he didn't know.

HAVE THEY BEEN FIRED? Chairman Stokes was asked? "We don't fire anybody," said the chairman. "We just decided we didn't need them. Their services will end at the end of the month."

"Then who answers questions about what the committee is doing, Stokes was asked? He said that would be the new special counsel, G. Robert Blakey, and called Blakey over to say hello. This dialogue ensued:

Reporter: May I have your home phone number? I won't misuse it.

Blakey: I haven't got a home. I am staying with my brother.

Reporter: Well, what's his phone number?

Blakey: I don't know.

Reporter: Then what is your number at the office?

Blakey: I don't know. I don't ever call myself on the phone.

DESPITE THESE impediments, Blakey said he would be the person to handle all press queries from now on. This offer fit in with Blakey's first statement when he was appointed to replace the fiery Richard Sprague in mid-June. At that time, Blakey said, "The purpose of this news conference is to announce that there will not be any more news conferences. I hope you members of the press will leave us for a while and let us work quietly and professionally."

In view of what happened yesterday, it appears likely reporters will have a tough time, at least until the committee does begin open hearings. Yesterday's session was advertised as open but remained so only until Stokes gaveled the committee to order.

Then the press was excluded and the committee reportedly took up such matters as personnel, an agreement with the CIA on handling classified documents and other committee business.