

# 'The Scenario'

## Assassinations Panel Studied 'Choreography' as the Art of Survival

By George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee spent much of its time at a secret meeting two weeks ago on the "choreography" and "scenario" for winning congressional and public support of its inquiry.

"This, of course, is not the way to conduct an investigation," Rep. Sel L. Devine (R-Ohio) observed at one point, according to a transcript of the session that was released inadvertently. "But what we are talking about today is survival."

At another point, committee chair-

### INQUIRY, FROM AI

I have some concern about the scenario and the choreography and I realize that while we do not want a circus atmosphere, we want it to be as content-filled as possible.

In the continuing discussion, Fithian cautioned against placing too much reliance on press coverage of public hearings by the committee. He complained specifically about coverage in The Washington Post.

Fithian agreed, however, that the two or three public meetings the committee had had were helping to erode the feeling generally held by many members of the House that "we really have not done anything" even "regardless of how badly Lardner [Washington Post staff writer George Lardner Jr.] has reported them, and he has reported them pretty badly."

Suggestions were made for secret briefings of the House Democratic leadership and other influential members of Congress such as the members of the Rules Committee. Edgar kept suggesting a follow-up public hearing

man Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) was reminded of the members of the press waiting outside the meeting room and was asked what he might tell "these wolves outside the door."

"I think you should keep them right where you have them now, championing at the bit and not tell them anything," advised Rep. Floyd J. Fithian (D-Ind.).

The March 17 meeting came at a time when the committee was still struggling to survive in the wake of weeks of acrimony over the efforts of former Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) to fire the committee's chief counsel, Richard A. Sprague. House

that might include a discussion of the budget and other matters.

He said the meeting could begin with a 45-minute segment, "split between the Kennedy and King assassinations as to what direction we are

*"... I guess I have some concern about the scenario and the choreography and I realize that while we do not want a circus atmosphere, we want it to be as content-filled as possible."*

—Rep. Robert W. Edgar (D-Pa.)

going and what evidence and information we can share publicly."

Deputy chief counsel Robert J. Lehner, the man in charge of the King investigation, said later in the meeting he would really be hard put to hold forth in public for the requisite length of time.

"I think when you talk about 45

leaders, already chagrined by the committee's slow pace in investigating the murders of President Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., were widely predicting its likely downfall.

With Stokes as their new chairman, committee members seemed to have been heartened by the publicity stemming from the public hearing of the day before, March 16, at which gang-land leader Santo Trafficante Jr. refused to testify, invoking the Fifth Amendment and other constitutional rights.

Rep. Robert W. Edgar (D-Pa.) pro-

minutes. I would have to do a little soft shoe dance" in the middle of it," Lehner told the committee.

Sprague agreed that a public session on the fruits of the investigation wouldn't work because the staff would

posed another public hearing that might include "something like what we did yesterday" when "we had Mr. Trafficante there and he was pleading the Fifth Amendment."

"I think we did more yesterday, even without getting factual information, simply because it focused again on the fact that we are looking into the issue," Edgar said enthusiastically.

"... I realize that, in terms of the investigative technique and issues, that is not the way to go," the Pennsylvania Democrat added, "but I guess

See INQUIRY, A5, Col. 3

survived its House test narrowly this week but only after Sprague resigned simply issued a report listing some of the uncorroborated leads it is pursuing.

At the March 17 meeting, committee members also agreed that the report should say nothing "of the impediments and the financial limitations and the problem of the previous Chairman (Gonzalez)."

Sprague asked how those sore points should be treated in the committee report.

"Ignored, I would say, completely," Chairman Stokes ordered.

"Benign neglect," interjected Rep. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.).

Stokes, a black congressman from Cleveland, agreed. "Yes," he said. "That deplorable expression."

The March 17 transcript was inadvertently released late Wednesday after the committee had authorized release of another hitherto secret transcript containing Sprague's rebuttal of various charges against him.

U-1-77  
WAS