

## Spectacle of Justice

The arrest in London of the chief suspect in the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. makes it virtually certain that this turbulent year will include two assassination trials of worldwide interest. Both will represent trials of the American system of justice as much as they will trials of the men in the dock.

Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused killer of President Kennedy, was gunned down under circumstances of unforgivable laxity in the basement of a Dallas police station. Not even the findings of a Warren Commission, with all the eminence of its members, could undo the damage done by that event and all the other travesties that marked official conduct in that case. Instead of a spectacle of order and justice, the world got a nightmarish legacy of suspicions that can never be dispelled.

A case can be "killed" without killing an accused before he goes on trial. Prejudicial comments made outside the courtroom by prosecutors, the police or other public officials can erase any real possibility of a fair trial, especially in cases of such transcendent interest as those stemming from the deaths of Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. King.

Up to now, the memory of the Oswald fiasco has had a sobering and salutary effect on the statements of all those involved in handling the prospective prosecutions—with the dismal exception of the Mayor of Los Angeles, Sam Yorty, a man uninhibited by considerations of propriety when these get in the way of an opportunity for national publicity.

Mayor Yorty has complicated things for prosecution and defense alike by disclosing the contents of a notebook found in the home of the prisoner in Senator Kennedy's shooting, and by adding his own highly personalized interpretations of possible motives.

But Mr. Yorty's abuse of responsibility merely accents the discretion and concern for defendants' rights exhibited by all other authorities in both cases. The press and television also have displayed far more restraint than they did in 1963. There seems a general recognition that the place to bring out the full facts is in a court of law.

That is the right and only way—for the protection of the men on trial, for the reassurance of the American people and for the preservation of America's place as a nation built on justice.