

# Kennedy-King Probe Chief Fired—But He Won't Leave

## Washington

Henry B. Gonzales, a Texas Democrat who is chairman of the House committee investigating the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., fired the panel's chief counsel yesterday. But the counsel, Richard A. Sprague, said Gonzalez' order had been countermanded by other committee members.

Gonzalez told Sprague to get out of the committee's office by 5 p.m. Sprague refused to leave.

Before issuing the order, Gonzalez called Sprague a "prima donna" and said the committee had to make a choice between preserving itself or keeping Sprague on the payroll.

Members siding with Sprague included the chairmen of both the committee's major subcommittees, their offices said.

The chairmen are Representative Richardson Preyer (Dem-N.C.) of the subcommittee investigating the John Kennedy assassination; and Walter Fauntroy, District of Columbia Democratic delegate, who heads the subcommittee investigating the King assassination.

In a news release, Gonzalez accused Sprague of "making a consistent attempt to undermine my chairmanship and malign me personally with the members of the committee staff."

Then Gonzalez sent a letter to Sprague, saying: "Your employment is terminated as of this date.

"Your personal possessions are to be removed by 5 o'clock today," Gonzalez' letter said. "You are to deliver your keys to the office superintendent and clear the building by 5 o'clock today."

But Sprague responded with a statement that he had been "directed by the committee to disregard the order by chairman Gonzalez on the basis of a determination that he does not have the power to unilaterally discharge Mr. Sprague."

The committee staff spokesman distributing the statement said he did not know how many committee members had opposed Gonzalez' order.

A Republican committee member, Stewart McKinney of Connecticut, said as far as he is concerned, Sprague can be fired only by all House Democrats in caucus and by the full assassinations committee.

Other committee members

were trying to arrange a committee meeting on the Sprague dispute, but many members of Congress already had left town last night for a week-long recess.

Gonzalez, criticism of Sprague came on a local Metromedia television show, "Panorama."

Gonzalez said he told Sprague at a meeting last Monday that "he no longer had my faith and confidence." Gonzalez did not give Sprague's response.

The chairman said he reached the conclusion last month that Sprague could not constructively continue as chief counsel because of the way he has handled the committee's public relations.

"One thing was the erroneous impression that was given last year that this was going to be a super snazzy type of legislative concept of CIA or FBI and that all the accountments of a special prosecutor's office were invested," Gonzalez said, "and that was a terrible error."

He referred to criticism in the House early this year to statements



AP Wirephoto

**RICHARD A. SPRAGUE**  
**'Prima donna' charge**

attributed to Sprague in a newspaper interview that investigators would be using devices such as voice stress evaluators and concealed microphones in their work.

Chairman Don Edwards (Dem-Calif.) of the House civil liberties subcommittee said that those statements made him fear that the investigation might violate civil liberties of witnesses.

Following the controversy over Sprague and over the committee's request for a \$6.5 million budget, the House conditionally extended the committee's life, but only through March.

Associated Press