



Louis Stokes
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head of Se-
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Gonzalez Replaced As Probe-Unit Boss

Washington

The House accepted the resignation of Henry Gonzalez (Dem-Tex.) as chairman of its Select Committee on Assassinations yesterday. Louis Stokes, a leader in the congressional black caucus, was named to succeed him.

Speaker Thomas (Tip) O'Neill chose Stokes, a Democrat from Cleveland, for the job minutes after the House voted, 296 to 100, to accept Gonzalez' resignation. The committee was formed last fall to investigate the deaths of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Stokes was a leader in the black caucus, which pushed for the King investigation, largely on suspicions that the civil rights leader died as a result of a conspiracy.

For years Gonzalez had called for a new probe of Kennedy's assassination. He predicted Sunday that, with him out of the chairmanship, the committee would forget about the Kennedy killing and make "a weak, one-legged investigation of the Martin Luther King assassination as a sop to blacks."

Gonzalez resigned after trying in vain to fire Richard Sprague as the committee's staff director and chief counsel. The former Philadelphia prosecutor remained on the job with the support of the committee's other 11 members, including Stokes.

Sprague welcomed Stokes' appointment, saying that "with a new chairman there is now no reason that the investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. cannot proceed in a thorough and professional manner, and we are sure it will."

House Democratic leader Jim Wright said Gonzalez, home in San Antonio with the flu, had rejected requests that he withdraw his resignation.

Wright asked the House to unanimously approve the resignation, but Robert Bauman (Rep-Md.) objected, thus forcing a roll call.

"There is a larger issue than just the gentleman from Texas," Bauman said. "I still have serious questions about Mr. Sprague's continued role on the committee."

"The media has painted a picture of conflict between a member of this body and a staff member," responded Samuel Devine (Rep-Ohio), a member of the select committee. "The conflict was actually between one member of the committee and 11 other members."

The vote to accept Gonzalez' resignation was seen partly as an effort to improve the committee's chances of carrying out the investigations and partly as an effort to grant the Texan's wish.

The committee has had numerous problems for months. The House must decide soon whether to keep it alive past this month.