

Committee investigates Jonestown, CIA connection

By HARRY JAFFE
States News Service

WASHINGTON — The House Intelligence Committee is investigating allegations that the CIA maintained links with the People's Temple cult in Jonestown, Guyana, and played a role in the colony's gruesome demise in November 1978.

At this point, the charges amount to unsubstantiated contentions lodged by members of former Rep. Leo Ryan's (D-San Mateo) staff. Ryan was assassinated in a bloody prelude to the mass murder-suicides that took the lives of 917 Americans at Jonestown.

This preliminary inquiry doesn't constitute a full-scale investigation, according to the panel's staff director, Michael O'Neill. He said a staff working group is now reviewing documents to determine whether the CIA charges merit a complete probe.

"This is a preliminary inquiry to determine if there is anything worth proceeding on," O'Neill said. In this initial probe, the committee will limit its work to existing documents without interviewing witnesses, according to O'Neill.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee — Congress' lead

panel on the Jonestown episode — referred the CIA allegations to the Intelligence Committee following public airing of the charges during hearings in February and March. The Intelligence panel most likely will focus on these allegations:

—The CIA was involved in covert activities in Guyana to support the government and protect U.S. commercial interests, in violation of the Hughes-Ryan Act which requires reporting of such activities.

— The CIA made a conscious decision to allow the Nov. 18, 1978, events to occur so its activities would remain secret, and a CIA agent witnessed Rep. Ryan's assassination that day.

Until now, the House Foreign Affairs Committee was the sole congressional panel to scrutinize the deaths of 917 followers of the Rev. Jim Jones at his Peoples Temple colony in Jonestown, a jungle outpost on South America's northern coast.

The mysterious cult leader ordered the mass death of his followers that day after Ryan was shot dead along with three reporters and a Peoples Temple defector at the nearby Port

Kaituma airstrip. Ryan was in Guyana on an official congressional mission to investigate alleged human rights abuses at Jonestown, where several people from his San Mateo district were living.

Immediately following the deaths, the House Foreign Affairs Committee launched a full inquiry. In May 1978, the investigation was completed and the panel asked other House and Senate committees to probe further into matters beyond its jurisdiction.

To date, only the Intelligence Committee has officially responded according to aides who worked on the Foreign Affairs investigation.

When the Foreign Affairs investigators compiled their 782-page report on the Jonestown episode, they concluded the CIA didn't play an important role in the Jonestown colony. No mention was made of the agency's participation in or any agent's presence at the Nov. 18 ritual deaths.

"No conclusive evidence is available to indicate that the CIA was acquiring information on Mr. Jones or the People's

Temple," the report says. "At no time was there any indication that the CIA was ever involved in Jonestown," said

Foreign Affairs Chairman Clement Zabokoi, D-Wis., in a March interview. And in recommending that the

allegation be referred to the Intelligence Committee, the Foreign Affairs staff characterized the charges as "largely speculative and unsubstantiated."

One of the three Foreign Affairs aides who compiled the original investigation called the charges "not credible, but adequate enough to refer to the Intelligence Committees."

3 generations graduate

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (AP) — Sandra Lozano's mother and grandmother will be at her high school graduation tonight. They'll be graduating, too.

Three generations — Elizabeth Guerrero, her daughter, Evelyn Ruiz, and Mrs. Ruiz' 17-year-old daughter, Sandra Lozano — will don caps and gowns to receive their general equivalency development diplomas in graduation exercises at the McCollum High School auditorium.

For Mrs. Guerrero, 60, it will be the culmination of a 45-year quest to finish high school.

"Times were hard back then.

It was the Depression, and I had to drop out in the ninth grade to manage a family," said the silver-haired woman, who has 27 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Ruiz and Ms. Lozano also dropped out of high school. But they later decided to return to school and obtain GED certificates, the equivalent of a high school diploma.

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