

"PROBERS HEAD FOR A RELUCTANT REV. JIM JONES," TIM REITERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, NOVEMBER 15, 1978

LTR 11/16 By Tim Reiterman
Examiner Staff Writer

NEW YORK — A congressional delegation is embarking today on a long-awaited journey to Peoples Temple's South American mission to check on the welfare of an estimated 1,200 U.S. citizens in the jungle project there.

Rep. Leo Ryan, D-San Mateo, said the delegation from the House International Relations Committee is going ahead with the flight to Guyana tonight, despite warnings that a visit to the mission was impossible at this time.

Taking the same flight will be about a dozen former temple members and other persons from the Bay Area who have relatives or loved ones at the agricultural project run by the temple under the leadership of the controversial Rev. Jim Jones. They are concerned that temple members might be victims of psychological or physical bondage at the remote mission.

"I am going in response to constituent requests," Ryan said in an interview yesterday, hours before the so-called Concerned Relatives group flew here from San Francisco.

"I intend to find out about (the temple's activities in Guyana) on the spot," Ryan said. "I'll be talking with the Guyanese government and the U.S. Embassy. And I'd like to talk to Mr. Jones."

"I sent him a wire asking to meet with him and asked him permission to see and talk with some of the relatives, close to 20 of them. I want to sit down with them on a one-to-one basis."

Ryan said he hoped to meet with the temple members either in Georgetown, Guyana's capital, or at the temple mission, Jonestown, an hour's plane ride and a nine-mile jeep trip away.

The responses to Ryan's wire as of yesterday were less than encouraging. Two lawyers representing the temple have given negative replies to his overtures, and a statement from the temple set strict conditions and time requirements that don't coincide with plans for the trip.

First, lawyer Mark Lane, the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theorist, wrote Ryan a letter Nov. 6 on behalf of the temple. Lane said the temple has asked that he be present during any congressional delegation visit, and he said his schedule precluded that during November.

"You should understand that Jonestown is a private community and that, while they appear willing to host your visit there under certain circumstances, courtesy requires that arrangements be made in advance of your visit," Lane said.

"You should be informed that various agencies of the U.S. government have somewhat consistently oppressed the Peoples Temple and sought to interfere with . . . a religious institution. I am now exploring that

matter fully in order to bring an action against those agencies of the U.S. government."

Through diplomatic channels, Ryan's office also received word that the temple wanted the delegation of Ryan and Rep. Ed Derwinski, R-Ill., to be balanced with two members of the congressional Black Caucus. The temple also stated that it wanted to choose the press members of the delegation.

In San Francisco, temple lawyer Charles Garry said the first he had heard of the visit was in a newspaper story. He later said he received a statement from the temple that said in part:

"It would be impossible for Mr. Ryan and his company of people to be accommodated at Jonestown at this time. We have received word he is bringing a whole group there (to) start an incident, provoking a media scene. We know from his own mouth his intentions are negative."

Ryan's office has been able to contact Lane and Garry, but not Jones. "If they set up objections that can't be met without any discussion, the conclusion has got to be obvious," Ryan said, ". . . that they are failing to show cooperation with an honest effort to obtain information. And that indicates they have something to hide."

"I am still making the assumption we can work it out."

Ryan's delegation will have to rely heavily on the cooperation of the Guyanese government and, ultimately, of Jones and the temple.

The congressman and his staff have emphasized that their visit would be an ideal occasion for the temple to allay the fears and concerns of some relatives of members there.

Through Garry, the temple has stated that certain sectors of the news media and some reporters are considered "enemies" of the temple because of reports based on the accounts of former members alleging corporal punishment and poor living conditions at temple facilities in both Guyana and the United States.

Garry has maintained that even the temple's most serious detractors would be impressed if they had the opportunity to see the project firsthand and to talk to members there. But there still are questions about whether reporters on this trip will be admitted to the mission.

The temple, which has claimed 20,000 members, has bases in Los Angeles, San Francisco and a number of other locales in California.

The Rev. Mr. Jones quit as head of the San Francisco Housing Authority in the summer of 1977 and reportedly has remained in Guyana since then.