

Prokes' statement defends Temple, asks tape be made public

EDITOR'S NOTE—The following is the statement read by Michael Prokes at a Modesto press conference before he shot himself.

Why did Jonestown end the way it did? I believe at least a good part of that answer can be found on the tape recording of the last hour of life in Jonestown. Unfortunately, the tape has never been played publicly and is being kept locked up by either the attorney general's office or the FBI.

But I don't find that surprising in light of what an American Embassy officer told me was on that tape.

Last December at the Matthews Ridge Guest House (located about 40 miles from Jonestown), a young man attached to the American Embassy named Charles English (who is 27 years old and had spent one year in foreign service) described parts of the tape recording to myself. Tim Carter and two reporters whose names I can't recall.

Probably the most significant thing he said was that he thought the tape would never be played publicly because it would be an embarrassment to the United States. He said it reveals that the people of Jonestown were not coerced into taking their lives, but rather the deaths resulted basically from a collective decision based upon the perception that the community was doomed and there was no use to continue.

English said that while he and a number of others were listening to the tape in Georgetown, U.S. Ambassador John Burke came into the room and also listened to it. When it was finished, Burke told those in the room in no uncertain terms, that they had better not breathe a word of what they heard. He then took the tape into his personal custody.

Another official, the man who headed the Guyanese end of the investigation into Jonestown, corroborated what English said was on the tape. But he went even beyond what English said. Skip Roberts (Guyana's crime chief) told me in a private conversation, the day before I left Guyana, that the tape showed solidarity of the people of Jonestown. He said he was deeply moved by what he heard. He said that if he were in Jonestown at the time of the deaths, he could see how he would have willingly died with the people, had he been part of the community.

Moreover, he told me he believed there was some outside plan to destroy Jonestown.

This was no crackpot making wild statements, but Guyana's No. 2 law enforcement official, trained by academies in the U.S., who is highly respected and has a reputation for being incorruptible. But it's doubtful that he can admit publicly the things he said to me in private. He may do it but it is a touchy political issue. Guyana feels it can ill-afford to offend or embarrass the U.S. while it has an outstanding I.M.F. loan and is seeking additional aid. (English, of course, would be risking his position to admit what

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he told us about the tape and Ambassador Burke.)

But if there is nothing to hide then whoever has the tape should be willing to make it public. It seems to me that a recording of the last hour of life for over 900 people is extremely relevant and crucial for the public to hear.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the recording was made intentionally. It was found on the tape machine in the pavilion, where meetings were normally recorded, and where it was in full view of scores of people. Jones asked that all meetings be recorded and I have no doubt that the last meeting was no exception because I believe he wanted to leave something that would prove why the people died. An article in Rolling Stone magazine said it concisely: It stated, "The mass suicides of history, Masada and Saipan, had occurred when a people were under siege and surrounded by enemies. Jones and the people of Jonestown were no exception: for months they had been harassed, persecuted, surrounded and besieged by shadow forces. When the final attack was imminent and undeniable, they chose to die."

I believe the tape will corroborate this, and I am convinced that its contents have not been deliberately misrepresented to the press. Why is it being kept locked up? Because its contents would help to reveal the truth about Jonestown, that's why. The press should demand that the tape be made public. I'm not talking about a transcript, either, because the embassy officer (Chas. English) said a transcript would not give an accurate portrayal of what was going on — there were too many overlapping forces. In order to be properly evaluated and understood, the entire 50 minutes of the original tape should be played to the press, unedited, and uncensored. (The Guyanese were provided a copy of the tape by American officials, but it may not be the same one Skip Roberts heard.)

It would take a lot of pressure for that tape to be played because I believe, from the accounts I've been given, it would reveal too clearly something that the government does not want to admit, and cannot admit—that Jonestown represents a symbol of the massive institutional failure of this country to meet the needs of its own citizens. It's no coincidence that most of the members of Peoples Temple were black, when you consider that most of the inhabitants of the huge slums and ghettos in virtually every large city of America are black. They don't like living in misery and if they could get out they would, but they aren't being provided the opportunities they need to do so.

That's why so many blacks joined Peoples Temple — it provided the opportunity to escape the misery of their lives in the ghetto. Jim Jones jumped into the vacuum created by the failure of this system to meet the needs of its black people. He then met those needs that had been neglected and gave the credit to Socialism. The U.S. Intelligence apparatus would obviously feel duty-bound to stop him, particularly in the light of their history and reputation for going after progressive political and civil rights organizations.

Beyond the satisfaction of their material needs, people found dignity and pride in the Temple that racism

had previously denied them. But attempts to deny Temple members their newfound freedom — and to us it was freedom — still persisted even after the move was made to another country. And that's why so many chose to die in the end. It was a moral act of courage and commitment to their beliefs. They were saying, "We're not going to take any more. We'll die by our own hand rather than

be destroyed or broken up by the long arm of the oppressor."

What I'm saying is that the reason so many people died and took the children's lives is because they believed their community — that they had built with their own hands — was under siege by the United States government, which I believe was the case. The State Dept. was well aware of the Temple's negotiations to move

gressman? Evidently. Otherwise, why did they allow Congressman Ryan to go to Jonestown when they were told in a legal affidavit that there was arms there and they knew the visit would be considered an act of provocation. Why did they allow it? Because the State Dept. wanted an incident. Well, they got it. I'm not even convinced that they got more than they bargained for, since the affidavit also told of suicide rehearsals — and warned the State Dept. that they should be taken seriously. Moreover, in a letter from Peoples Temple to the State Dept., it was stated that Temple members would rather die than be harassed from continent to continent. The State Dept. purposely called the bluff by sending Ryan; it was a deliberate act of provocation.

I believe in the basic rightness of the life and work that went on in Jonestown, and I can't disassociate myself from the people who died, nor do I want to. They were beautiful people who cared about each other and who identified with all people who suffer oppression and persecution around the world. Jonestown functioned on a high level of ethical behavior and human devotion that you had to see and experience in order to comprehend. The rights of the individual were respected and defended; sharing and concern for others was a requirement. These things were like a code of the community. The people weren't brainwashed fanatics or cultists — the Temple was not a cult. It was a political organization that built its own socialist community. It might be fair to say they were fanatical in one sense: after moving 6,000 miles to get away from racism and harassment, they weren't going to be pushed around any more. Maybe it sounds trite, but they were saying basically the same thing as Patrick Henry, that is, "Let us have our freedom, or we will die."

But the State Department and CIA couldn't afford to let such a large group of socialists from the United States find freedom in another land. So they harassed us by sending their lackeys, through Tim Stoen, to Guyana and deliberately played upon the paranoia that existed in Jonestown, until they finally got what they wanted.

The truth about Jonestown is being covered up because our government agencies were involved in its destruction up to their necks. I am convinced of this because, among many other reasons, I was an informant when I first joined Peoples Temple. I didn't remain one, however, because I came to realize that the Temple was probably the only hope for the many people it was helping off the streets, off of drugs, out of crime, and out of mental institutions, jails, and prisons. I learned to identify with these people until they became my brothers and sisters and then I understood what it meant to be black and old and poor in this society—the hell of living every day in fear.

The people of Jonestown died—as one suicide note said—because they weren't allowed to live in peace. They died because they didn't want to be left with no choice but to come back to live in the rat-infested ghettos of America. They died for all those who suffer oppression. I refuse to let my black brothers and sisters and others in Jonestown die in vain.

to the Soviet Union in order to escape the threats to its security in Guyana. Undoubtedly, the State Dept. and the CIA wanted to prevent a tremendous Soviet propaganda victory based on nearly 1,000 Americans moving to the Soviet Union in quest of the Human Rights they had been denied in the U.S. But to what lengths was the State Dept. prepared to go to discredit Jonestown? Would they sacrifice a con-



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See photo by J. Robert Summers

Still under house arrest in Georgetown, Guyana, Prokes was allowed to walk the streets after his release from jail detention and stopped to talk with a young boy.

Prokes was top student, TV newsman before Jones

Many Modestans knew Mike Prokes from the days he grew up and went to school in Modesto.

And many other people in the Stanislaus area came to know him as a television newsman who worked as the Stockton bureau chief for KXTV, Channel 10, in the early 1970s.

Late last year, he became known to a nationwide audience as one of the surviving top aides of the Rev. Jim Jones after the Jonestown bloodbath in the Guyana jungle which left Jones, more than 900 of his followers, Rep. Leo Ryan, and three newsmen dead in November.

Now Prokes, who followed Jones in life, has chosen to follow him in death.

Prokes was born in Modesto in 1947. He was a 1965 graduate of Davis High, where he was a four-year honor student and member of the football team. He attended Modesto Junior College, then earned a bachelor of science degree

in communications from California State University, Fullerton in 1969.

He began working for KXTV in 1970, and left in 1972, shortly after doing an interview of Jim Jones.

His former colleagues at the television station described him as quiet, stable and sensible. His friends in high school had talked of his good nature and sense of humor.

"If anything he was quiet and very conservative," said Dale Muratore, a close friend who was one of the few to keep in contact with Prokes after high school.

Family members described him as deeply religious. He initially was a devout member of the Christian Science faith and had been elected reader for the Second Church of Christ, Scientist in Modesto, the top post in a local church.

Late in 1972, after a news interview story, he personally turned to Jones and the Peoples Temple, apparently feeling Jones and his social beliefs offered a stronger message to those in need of help.

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Serving the Peoples Temple, he turned his communications abilities to public relations, handling correspondence and media contacts for the temple.

One of his friends in Modesto said Prokes fell under the spell of Jones, even though Prokes knew Jones was not really that religious. Jones was using religion to get enough followers to force social justice in this society, Prokes had explained in one of several letters to his friend.

The friend described a meeting with Prokes in 1976, saying Prokes was "frightened — everyone involved with the Peoples Temple was frightened."

But Prokes remained loyal to Jones. When he was arrested by Guyanese authorities following the killings and suicides, Prokes and two other temple members were armed with pistols and were carrying \$600,000. They said they were told to deliver the money to the Russian embassy in Georgetown, Guyana.

Prokes had adopted a young black boy as his son and married a temple follower to give her child, not his, a name. They all died in Jonestown.

After being jailed for four days, Prokes was released but told not to leave town. Instead, he escaped Guyana during December, without official permission, to fulfill a promise to his family to come home for Christmas.

In January he was called to appear before a federal grand jury in San Francisco which is investigating whether a conspiracy hatched in the United States led to Ryan's murder. For the most part, he took the 5th Amendment, answering only questions as to his name, age and address as well questions about his attorney, he said.

Prokes was the son of Mary Prokes of Modesto. Other survivors include two brothers, Tom Prokes of Modesto and Jim Prokes of Sacramento; and two sisters, Mary Beth Rasmussen of the Fresno area and Vickie Prokes of Modesto.



"I refuse to let my black brothers and sisters and others in Jonestown die in vain," Michael Prokes states



at the press conference he called Tuesday evening.

Friend shocked on learning of Prokes' suicide

By Thorne Gray
See staff writer

News of Michael Prokes' suicide came as a shock to Michael Carter, who with Prokes and Carter's brother Tim left Jonestown carrying more than \$500,000 in U.S. money addressed to the Russian Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana.

"I'm in shock. This is the worst I've felt," said the the younger Carter brother, now 21, from the apartment in Boise, Idaho, where he lives with Tim.

"We were friends," Mike explained. "I didn't think he would do this."

He explained he had been talking with Prokes about writing "some kind of a book" about Jonestown and Guyana. The project never got off the ground.

But the last time Tim talked to Prokes was only two weeks ago. Mike planned to call Prokes the past several days, but "didn't get a chance."

The Carters and Prokes were arrested by Guyanese authorities several days after Rep. Leo J. Ryan was killed with three newsmen and a Jonestown defector on the small airstrip near the Jonestown settlement.

The Ryan murder triggered the mass suicides in which 913 of the Rev. Jim Jones' followers died.

Among them were Tim Carter's wife, Gloria, and son, Malcolm, 15-months; Mike Carter's wife, a black, and a daughter, and their sister, Terrie Carter, 24.

The brothers spoke of a "strange mixture" of fundamental Christianity

and Marxism, according to reports from Paul B. Rogers of the Idaho Statesman from Georgetown where he interviewed the Carter brothers on a hotel veranda.

He said they spoke of a troubled childhood. Tim had been a Marine radioman in Vietnam, returning home in 1967. The Vietnam War changed his life, Tim claimed, and for a time he was lost, a wanderer, until he heard about Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple from a black woman he met in Sparks, Nev.

Tim hitched a ride to the Peoples Temple in San Francisco in January 1973. Soon he persuaded Terrie to join him, then Mike.

Rogers reported Tim was sent to San Francisco in the weeks before Rep. Ryan made his visit to Jonestown, to infiltrate parents who were agitating to free their children from Jim Jones.

He claimed he went to see if anyone was plotting to assassinate Jones, and said he had been present during five previous attempts on Jones' life.

Tim returned to Jonestown three days before Ryan arrived to report the parents were out to get Jones. The leader almost went berserk, Tim Carter recalled in the interview with Rogers.

But during the Ryan visit to Jonestown, it was Tim who jumped forward to pull a knifer attacker way from Ryan, saving the congressman for the moment.

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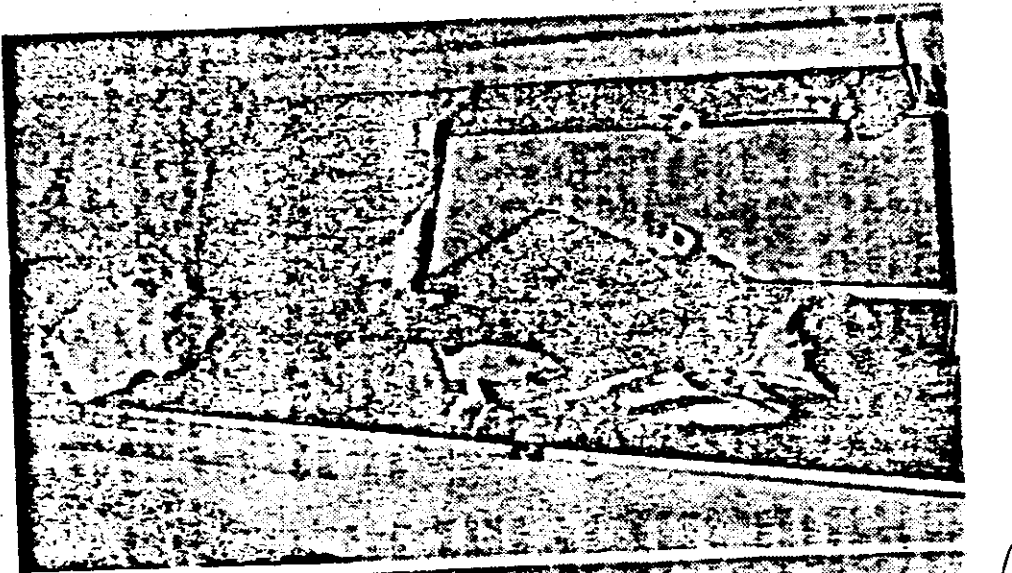
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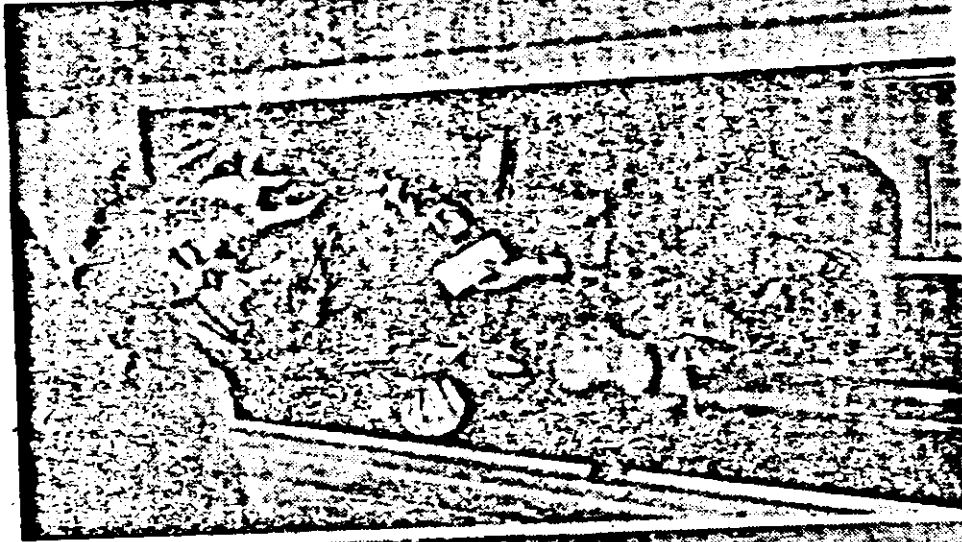
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Rushing into the motel bathroom, newsmen find Prokes lying face down on the floor. See reporter Kent Pierce and a cameraman.



See reporter Bob Szumero applies wound compresses.

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When Ryan left Jonestown, all seemed well. Then word came of Ryan's murder. Jones called his people to the pavilion and the mass suicides began. The Carter brothers

watched as their wives and babies died, then were tapped to carry the suitcase of money from the compound with Prokes.

Mike Carter refused to talk about



Paramedics move their patient to the ambulance.

that episode, noting he and his brother remain under federal restrictions in investigation of Ryan's murder.

Their father, M.L. Carter of Garden City, Idaho, said the brothers testified briefly before a federal grand jury in

San Francisco in January, just two days after Prokes appeared.

In Guyana, Prokes and the Carters were jailed four days, then released and finally allowed to leave the country in late December.

Cultist Mike Prokes stages own suicide

By J. Robert Bazemore
See staff writer

Jonestown survivor Michael Prokes shot and fatally wounded himself in a Modesto motel room Tuesday night, nearly four months after the mass suicides of Peoples Temple followers in Guyana.

In a death which appeared to be as coolly planned as those in Jonestown, Prokes put a .38-caliber revolver to the left side of his head moments after he stepped into the bathroom. Eight members of the press were attending a press conference in the adjoining room.

It was the first death of a Peoples Temple member since 913 persons died Nov. 18 in the Guyana massacre. A psychiatrist who counseled a number of the survivors in Georgetown, Guyana, before their return to the United States and has set up a program to help them in the bay area predicted there would be suicides among the survivors.

Prokes, 31, shot himself at 7:18 p.m., immediately after he read a lengthy five-page statement praising

the work of his former leader Jim Jones. He died nearly three hours later at Doctors' Hospital. The statement claimed the United States was engaged in a conspiracy to eliminate the Peoples Temple settlement in Jonestown.

Prokes left a suicide note in the bathroom of the room he rented in the Kansas Avenue motel where he isolated himself for the shooting. In it, he said he didn't kill himself over dependency about Jonestown because he could live with that. He also said he did not kill himself because he was "programmed."

The last sentence in the page-long suicide note said, "If my death doesn't prompt another book about the end of Jonestown, it wasn't worth living."

Seemingly in good spirits, Prokes greeted six television newsmen from three Sacramento-based television stations, and a reporter and photographer from The Modesto Bee.

Before the press conference, held in a room at Motel 6, he had promised to make a major statement.

Just prior to the 7 p.m. press conference, Prokes told The Bee he was going to make a telephone call. He walked into the small motel room a few minutes after 7, entered the bathroom and emerged to take his place

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behind two microphones and two tape recorders on a small table.

He read from a 42-page package of statements with inflections in his voice for emphasis. He sipped water from a styrofoam cup, got up and handed a large envelope of statements to KCRA television reporter Kent Pierce to distribute to the others.

Pierce asked Prokes if Jones ordered the killing of Rep. Leo Ryan. Without answering the question, Prokes walked toward the bathroom and closed the door. As he closed the door, he pulled a plug on one of the television lights. Prokes said, "I'm sorry to leave you guys in the dark." He tossed the cord out and another reporter turned the room lamp on. Prokes turned on the water in the sink and no more than 15 seconds later the eight newsmen in the room heard a gunshot.

Stunned for a moment the reporters looked around. "My God, he shot himself," said Pierce.

Two television cameramen pushed the door open. Pierce and this reporter rushed inside.

Prokes was crumpled on the floor with a .38-caliber revolver with a 2-inch barrel lying on the floor next to him.

There was a massive head wound on the right side of his head above the ear and a lesser wound on the left side. Reporters grabbed face cloths from a rack and applied pressure to the wounds. Another reporter ran to telephone an ambulance and the police.

Prokes continued to breath heavily and this reporter asked if anyone had CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) training. No one replied. Prokes' pulse remained strong but his breathing began to cease. This reporter administered mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Several minutes later two teams of paramedics arrived and took over.

There was no indication Prokes may have planned to shoot himself.

He planned the press conference on Monday after a visit to The Bee. He had asked to hold the press conference in the office of the newspaper, but was told that would not be appropriate if other news media were to be invited.

Even after repeated pleas, Prokes refused to discuss the nature of what he would say at the press conference. His only statement was, "You will have a headline."

After he made the arrangements for the motel room Tuesday morning, he telephoned the three television stations. Rich Ibarra, a reporter for KOVR of Stockton-Sacramento, said the person who took Prokes' call quot-

ed Prokes as saying he would "drop a bombshell" at the news conference.

During the weeks after the Jonestown massacre, while Prokes and some 80 other survivors were detained in Georgetown by the Guyanese government, psychiatrist Dr. Hardat A.S. Sukhdeo visited and talked with the survivors.

Sukhdeo is a native of Guyana and currently is chief of psychiatry and deputy chairman of psychiatry at the New Jersey Medical School.

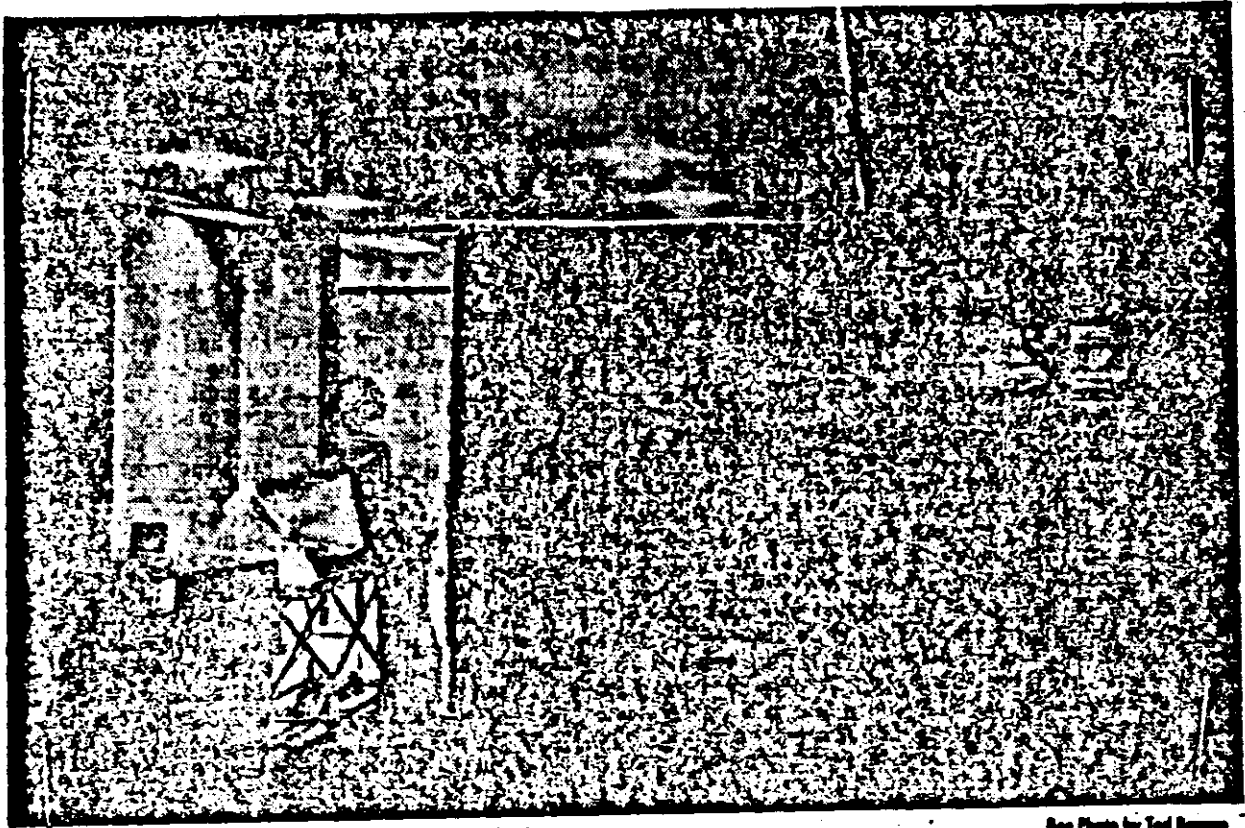
It was Prokes whom the psychiatrist had told The Bee was despondent and could be a candidate for suicide. Sukhdeo and this reporter talked with Prokes about his mental state and

Prokes said he was fine and would "keep his head together."

When told Prokes had shot himself Tuesday night, Sukhdeo said, "It's one thing to make predictions and it's another to see them come true."

He expressed regret that Prokes did not contact him after returning to the United States and that his efforts to reach Prokes had been unsuccessful. When contacted two weeks ago by The Bee, after a visit to California, Sukhdeo asked that Prokes call him. Prokes' mother was advised as was Prokes. The message was repeated on Monday when Prokes said he planned a press conference.

But it was not just Prokes who Suk-



See Photo by Ted Hamm

At Doctors' Hospital emergency room, the gurney stretcher is remade.

hdeo said he was worried about. The East Coast psychiatrist has set up a center in Berkeley to help Peoples Temple survivors move back into society.

"I was quite upset at seeing what I predicted in San Francisco. People were in a much more serious state. They were not coping in the United States society. They do not have the financial and psychological support," he said.

Sukhdeo revealed that he prescribed antidepressants and sleeping pills to Prokes while he was in Georgetown by giving them to his companion, Tim Carter to administer. "I felt

that at that point Tim and Mike Carter were in a better frame of mind than Mike," the psychiatrist said.

He said he had wanted to get in touch with Prokes. "If I had I might have been able to make an impact. ... I don't know.

"There are others I'm just as much concerned about. Some I have not seen and others I have seen. And I'm still worried. "My opinion is as life becomes more difficult this will be one way out and maybe the easiest.

"Like I have said in the past they were all programmed for suicide and this will be the easy way out," the psychiatrist added.



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Mortally wounded, Michael Prokes lies in the motel bathroom as Bee reporter Bob Bazemore and other

newsmen rush to apply first aid compresses and resuscitation. More photos Pages A-16, A-17.

See Photo by Debbie Nade

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)



Michael Prokes

Prokes had no chance for survival

By Steven Paul Motenko
and
Becky McClure
See staff writers

Michael Prokes was pronounced dead at 10:35 p.m. Tuesday in Doctors' Hospital, the victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound through the left temple.

Prokes survived, just more than three hours after shooting himself during a press conference at a Modesto motel. "The only part of his brain not destroyed was the breathing center," a hospital spokesman said.

The Bee learned that a decision was made not to connect Prokes to any life support systems.

Doctors' Ambulance paramedics delivered Prokes to the hospital emergency room at 7:43 p.m., only minutes after he shot himself in a motel room bathroom.

Paramedics said Prokes was "essentially dead" when they arrived at the motel. They said he stopped breathing on his own in the ambulance but began breathing again without the aid of a respirator after he arrived at the hospital.

Fragments of the single bullet were said to be scattered throughout his brain.

Prokes was transferred from the emergency room to a private room at 9:45 p.m. after doctors decided his condition was inoperable and in the words of hospital spokesmen "extremely critical."

The transfer to the room was undertaken quickly while reporters and cameramen were diverted to a press briefing.

Eight emergency room personnel surrounded the gurney on which Prokes was transferred, his head swathed in white bandages.

Prokes' older brother, Tom, who lives in Modesto, was at the hospital. He spent much of his time trying to contact other family members who were out of town.

Jim Prokes, Michael's younger brother, arrived at the hospital at 10:10 p.m. from Sacramento. Prokes' mother had been with Jim and report-

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edly returned to Modesto, distraught, but did not go to the hospital.

"There will be no statement until the family has worked through its grieving period for a beloved member of our family. We are a very close-knit family," Jim Prokes said through a hospital spokesman.

Tom and Jim Prokes were at their brother's bedside when he was pronounced dead.

Prokes' sister, Victoria, was vacationing in Yosemite National Park and could not be immediately contacted. She called the hospital about 10:30 p.m. saying she had just heard about her brother.

When word spread around Modesto that Prokes had shot himself, friends began arriving at the hospital. Most were solemn and composed, but one young woman was crying. One friend,

who did not wish to be identified, said "I just heard it on TV; I've known him for a long time." He added he had not seen or talked to Prokes since his return from Guyana.

At 9:30 p.m. hospital officials received a call from Tim Carter in Idaho, who had escaped from Jonestown with Prokes. While waiting to talk to Tom Prokes, Carter told The Bee that he had just gotten home and heard about what happened. Carter would not answer questions, saying he would have to check with his attorney before talking to the press because of a federal probe into Jonestown. But he was full of questions about Prokes. "How is he? How did it happen? Can you give me the scenario?" he asked. "I understand from my brother that Bob (Bazemore, Bee reporter) was the first one there, is that right?"