

Guyanese Jury Acquits People's Temple Member

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, May 22 (AP)—A Guyanese jury today acquitted former People's Temple member Larry Layton of charges of attempted murder in the November, 1978 ambush of a visiting U.S. congressman that led to a mass suicide at the sect's Jonestown settlement.

More than 900 persons killed themselves by drinking poison or were murdered at the colony Nov. 18, 1978, following the ambush killings of Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.), three journalists and a temple defector at the Port Kaituma airstrip near Jonestown. Ryan had visited the settlement of expatriate U.S. citizens to investigate alleged abuses of cult members by their leader Jim Jones.

In the trial that ended today, Layton was charged only with the attempted murder of two defectors, Monica Bagby and Vern Gosney, who survived the airstrip fusillade. He has also been charged with five counts in the murder of Ryan and the other four victims and will face another trial.

The two-woman, 10 man jury deliberated two and a half hours before delivering the verdict. Layton said after the verdict that he knew he would be acquitted of the charges.

A woman juror, who asked that she not be identified, said: "A child would have acquitted him." She said the state failed to produce sufficient evidence.

The jury voted unanimously to declare Layton innocent of shooting and wounding Bagby. The vote was 10-2 in connection with the same charges involving Gosney. A unanimous vote is needed only on murder charges in Guyana.

Police arrested Layton immediately after the verdict and returned him to the Georgetown jail where he had been held prior to the trial. Authorities said a hearing on the remaining murder charges could be held as early as June.

Defense attorney Rex McKay said he was elated because "they didn't get the scapegoat they wanted." He said

he would ask the court to dismiss all murder charges against Layton.

Layton was tried on the lesser charges first because authorities felt it would be easier to prove his guilt on charges of attempted murder, officials said.

Prosecutor Vidyanand Persaud said he lost the case because key witnesses refused to make the trip from the United States to testify. Gosney testified, but Bagby did not appear.

In his defense presentation, McKay cited Bagby's failure to appear at the trial, and accused Gosney of being a man who is "not likely to tell the truth." He also contended there were irregularities in ballistics tests on bullets fired in the assault.

McKay had said the test firing of bullets from a gun believed to have been used by Layton, was "not carried out by a Guyanese police expert," but by Evan Hodge, an FBI agent. As a result, the evidence was not made available to the court, he said.

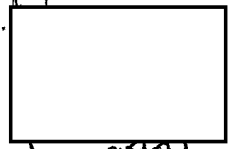
McKay told the jury Gosney is "an atheist or an agnostic" and had declined to swear on the Bible before taking the witness stand.

In a surprise move today, the prosecutor took only one hour in his final summation to the jury. It had been thought he would take most of the day and that the evidence would not be presented to the jury until Friday.

Persaud said Layton had committed a "cowardly act" in the shooting, and had been seen "receiving instructions from cult leader Jim Jones, and shots outside the plane were the signal for him to open fire."

The prosecutor said Layton alleged a "convenient loss of memory" at the moment he pulled the trigger. Layton, in an unsworn statement to the court made during the trial, said he did not remember shooting anyone.

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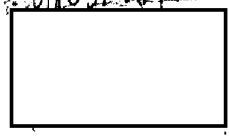
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GEORGETOWN, GUYANA (UPI) - GUYANA MAY DROP MURDER CHARGES AGAINST A PEOPLE'S TEMPLE FANATIC IN THE BUTCHER-KNIFE SLAYINGS OF A FAMILY OF FOUR IF THE SUSPECT GETS A HEAVY SENTENCE NEXT WEEK ON A CHARGE OF ATTEMPTED MURDER TO WHICH HE PLEADED GUILTY.

ALTHOUGH THERE IS OFFICIALLY NO SUCH THING AS PLEA-BARGAINING IN GUYANA, CHARLES BEIKMAN'S GUILTY PLEA MONDAY TO A SINGLE COUNT OF ATTEMPTED MURDER AGAINST A 9-YEAR-OLD ADOPTED GRANDDAUGHTER OF SELF-APPOINTED BISHOP JIM JONES, STEPHANIE JONES, APPEARED TO BE A DEAL.

BEIKMAN PLEADED INNOCENT TO CHARGES OF MURDERING THE TEMPLE'S SPOKESWOMAN IN THE GUYANA CAPITAL, SHARON AMOS, AND HER THREE CHILDREN.

PROSECUTORS SAID LATER IF BEIKMAN GETS THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE OF LIFE IMPRISONMENT NEXT TUESDAY FROM HIGH COURT JUDGE CECI KENNARD, THEY WILL DROP THE MURDER CHARGES.

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 JONESTOWN

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA (AP) -- ONE OF THE TWO PERSONS CHARGED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PEOPLES TEMPLE TRAGEDY PLEADED GUILTY TODAY TO A CHARGE OF ATTEMPTED MURDER. ON A SEPARATE CHARGE, HE SAID HE WAS INNOCENT OF SLAYING A TOP CULT MEMBER AND HER THREE CHILDREN HERE IN 1978.

AUTHORITIES SAID CHARLES BEIKMAN, 44, A COOK AND SHOEMAKER FOR THE JONESTOWN COMMUNITY, WAS LIKELY TO BE SENTENCED LATER TODAY OR WEDNESDAY FOR THE ATTEMPTED MURDER OF STEPHANIE JONES, A NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL AND NO RELATION TO CULT LEADER JIM JONES.

BEIKMAN ALSO WAS CHARGED WITH MURDER IN THE DEATH OF SHARON AMOS, A TOP TEMPLE OFFICIAL, AND HER THREE CHILDREN AT THE CULT'S GEORGETOWN HEADQUARTERS ON THE NIGHT OF THE MASS-SUICIDE OF MORE THAN 900 PERSONS IN JONESTOWN ON NOV. 18, 1978.

GUYANA CRIMINAL COURT OFFICIALS SAID THE TRIAL FOR THE SECOND PERSON CHARGED IN THE TRAGEDY, SCHEDULED FOR TODAY IN ANOTHER COURT ROOM, WAS POSTPONED UNTIL MAY 5.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY REX MCKAY, WHO REPRESENTED LARRY LAYTON, 33, A FORMER MARINE, WON A POSTPONEMENT WHEN MCKAY ARGUED THAT HE PLANNED TO REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA IN AN ARBITRATION CASE IN WASHINGTON, D.C., SHORTLY.

LAYTON IS CHARGED WITH THE MURDER OF REP. LEO RYAN, D.-CALIF., THREE JOURNALISTS AND A PEOPLES TEMPLE DEFECTOR.

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(TEMPLE)

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA (UPI) - A PEOPLE'S TEMPLE CULTIST WAS SENTENCED TO FIVE YEARS TODAY FOR THE ATTEMPTED MURDER OF A 9-YEAR CHILD IN A THROAT-SLASHING SPREE THAT CLAIMED FOUR OTHER LIVES ON THE NIGHT OF THE JONESTOWN MASSACRE.

PROSECUTORS SAID CHARLES E. BEIKMAN, 47, A HUSKY FORMER MARINE FROM INDIANAPOLIS, MAY BE OFFERED A PLEA-BARGAINING DEAL TO SPARE HIM FURTHER PUNISHMENT ON THE FOUR REMAINING MURDER COUNTS.

A MURDER CONVICTION COULD CARRY A SENTENCE OF DEATH BY HANGING.

BEIKMAN, WHO CANNOT READ OR WRITE AND SERVED AS THE COMMUNE'S SHOEMAKER AND COOK, STOOD IMPASSIVELY WHEN GUYANA HIGH COURT JUDGE CECIL KENNARD PASSED SENTENCE.

BEIKMAN PLEADED GUILTY TO ATTEMPTING TO KILL STEPHANIE JONES, AN ADOPTED GRANDDAUGHTER OF SELF-STYLED BISHOP JIM JONES, THE NIGHT OF NOV. 18, 1978, IN GEORGETOWN AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME JONES LED 911 OF HIS FOLLOWERS INTO A MASS MURDER-SUICIDE AT THE JONESTOWN JUNGLE OUTPOST.

THE JONES GIRL WAS THE ONLY ONE OF FIVE PERSONS WHO SURVIVED A BLOODY THROAT-CUTTING ATTACK WITH AN 18-INCH BUTCHERKNIFE AND A KITCHEN KNIFE IN THE BATHROOM OF THE TEMPLE'S HEADQUARTERS IN THE GUYANESE CAPITAL.

THE TEMPLE'S SPOKESWOMAN IN GEORGETOWN, SHARON AMOS, AND HER THREE CHILDREN, LAIN HARRIS, CHRISTA AND MARTIN, WERE KILLED.

THE PROSECUTION DID NOT IMMEDIATELY INDICATE AFTER THE SENTENCING WHETHER MURDER CONVICTIONS WILL STILL BE SOUGHT AGAINST BEIKMAN.

BUT PROSECUTORS SAID THEY MAY PRESS FOR A PLEA BARGAINING DEAL IN WHICH BEIKMAN, WHILE PLEADING GUILTY TO LESSER CHARGES OF MANSLAUGHTER, WOULD NOT RECEIVE ADDITIONAL JAIL TIME. INSTEAD, THE SENTENCES WOULD RUN CONCURRENTLY WITH THE FIVE-YEAR TERM IMPOSED TODAY.

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PROSECUTORS SAID WAITING FOR BEIKMAN'S CHIEF DEFENSE ATTORNEY, REX MCKAY, TO RETURN FROM THE UNITED STATES TO START NEGOTIATIONS.

IN IMPOSING A RELATIVELY LENIENT SENTENCE, JUDGE KENNARD SAID HE HAD CONSIDERED THE FACT THAT BEIKMAN, UNABLE TO GET BAIL, HAS ALREADY SPENT ALMOST TWO YEARS IN JAIL IN THE SOUTH AMERICAN NATION.

"YOU ARE A PERSON AWAY FROM THE UNITED STATES WHERE YOU LIVE AND IT MUST HAVE BEEN A NERVE-WRACKING EXPERIENCE TO BE IN PRISON IN A COUNTRY NOT YOUR OWN," KENNARD SAID.

HE SAID HE ALSO TOOK INTO ACCOUNT EVIDENCE THAT THE JONES GIRL'S CUT ON THE NECK WAS SUPERFICIAL AND PROBABLY HAD BEEN CAUSED NOT WITH THE BUTCHER KNIFE BUT WITH A KITCHEN KNIFE.

HE SAID HE ALSO ACCEPTED BEIKMAN'S EXPLANATION THAT MRS. AMOS HERSELF TOLD BEIKMAN TO HELP HER CUT HER OWN THROAT AND THOSE OF THE CHILDREN, BUT THE JUDGE SAID BEIKMAN WAS STILL "LUCKY" NOT TO BE FACING THE MORE SERIOUS MURDER CHARGES.

A SECOND PEOPLE'S TEMPLE SUSPECT STILL IN JAIL, LARRY LAYTON, 34, IS SCHEDULED TO GO TO TRIAL MAY 5 FOR THE MURDER OF CALIFORNIA CONGRESSMAN LEO RYAN, THREE NEWSMEN AND A TEMPLE DEFECTOR. BUT ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT LAYTON, A FORMER SAN FRANCISCO RESIDENT, ALSO WILL BE PERMITTED TO PLEA BARGAIN.

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GEORGETOWN, GUYANA (AP) -- ONE OF TWO PERSONS CHARGED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PEOPLES TEMPLE TRAGEDY WAS SENTENCED TODAY TO FIVE YEARS HARD LABOR FOR THE ATTEMPTED MURDER OF A 9-YEAR-OLD GIRL.

CHARLES EDWARD BEIKMAN, 44, A COOK AND SHOEMAKER FOR THE JONESTOWN COMMUNITY, HAD PLEADED GUILTY TO THAT CHARGE BUT INNOCENT OF SLAYING A TOP CULT MEMBER AND HER THREE CHILDREN ON NOV. 18, 1978.

COURT SOURCES SAID THE STATE IS NOT EXPECTED TO PURSUE CHARGES THAT BEIKMAN MURDERED SHARON AMOS, AN AIDE TO CULT LEADER JIM JONES AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER FOR THE PEOPLES TEMPLE.

ON THE SAME NIGHT THAT MRS. AMOS AND THREE OF HER CHILDREN DIED IN GEORGETOWN, THEIR THROATS SLASHED EAR-TO-EAR, JONES LED MORE THAN 900 OF HIS FOLLOWERS TO THEIR DEATHS IN A MASS MURDER-SUICIDE IN JONESTOWN, 150 MILES TO THE NORTHWEST.

THE MASS KILLINGS FOLLOWED THE SLAYING BY CULT MEMBERS OF REP. LEO RYAN, D-CALIF., THREE JOURNALISTS AND A DEFECTING CULT MEMBER ON A JUNGLE AIRSTRIP NEAR JONESTOWN.

ANOTHER CULT MEMBER, LARRY LAYTON, 33, A FORMER MARINE, IS CHARGED WITH THE MURDER OF RYAN AND THE OTHERS. HIS TRIAL HAS BEEN DELAYED UNTIL MAY 5.

BEIKMAN HAD PLEADED GUILTY TO THE ATTEMPTED MURDER OF STEPHANIE JONES, NO RELATION TO THE CULT LEADER, WHO WAS IN A BATHROOM OF THE HOUSE WHERE THE AMOS FAMILY DIED.

THE FIVE-YEAR SENTENCE MEANS BEIKMAN COULD BE OUT OF PRISON THREE AND A HALF YEAR FROM NOW, WITH TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR. THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE FOR ATTEMPTED MURDER IS LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

IN PASSING SENTENCE, JUDGE CECIL KENNARD SAID HE TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THAT BEIKMAN HAD BEEN IN CUSTODY SINCE NOV. 23, 1978 AND HAD SHOWN SOME CONTRITION BY PLEADING GUILTY IN THE STEPHANIE JONES CASE. THE JUDGE ALSO SAID THE GIRL HAD SUFFERED ONLY A SUPERFICIAL WOUND WITH A KITCHEN KNIFE -- NOT WITH THE BUTCHER'S KNIFE USED IN THE MURDERS.

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