

Hearing To Decide On Layton Trial Begins In Guyana

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana — A court began a formal hearing Wednesday on whether to send to trial Peoples Temple cult member Larry Layton on charges of killing Rep. Leo Ryan and four others in a jungle airport ambush that triggered the 913 Jonestown murder-suicides.

Coroner Haroon Bacchus also began an investigation of whether murder charges can be brought in the death of any of the Jonestown Peoples Temple commune victims, including cult leader the Rev. Jim Jones.

Layton, 32, of San Francisco, was clean shaven and appeared composed as Magistrate Krishna Veni Shinta began the hearing into whether the follower of the Rev. Jim Jones should be brought to trial. A magistrate's hearing under British law is similar to a grand jury hearing in U.S. jurisprudence.

Layton was charged with the Nov. 18 slayings of Ryan, a California Democrat, NBC reporter Don Harris and cameraman Robert Brown, San Francisco Examiner photographer Gregory Robinson and People's Temple defector Patricia Parks, 44.

Mrs. Park's son, Dale, 27, who survived the ambush at the Port Kaituma airstrip, was the first witness at the court hearing. He was expected to testify at a later court session.

Dale Parks testified Jones was irate and threatened his life after learning the Parks family — Mrs. Parks, husband Gerald, 46, Dale and his sisters Brenda, 18, and Tracy, 12 and grandmother Edith — wanted to leave Jonestown with Ryan.

Parks said a total of 17 Temple defectors elected to leave with Ryan and the reporters, who went to the jungle commune 150 miles northwest of Georgetown to check on complaints some cult members were being held against their will.

Asked how close Layton was to Jim Jones, Parks testified the commune was run by Jim Jones, his adopted son Jonny, and Lee Ingram, the coach of the cult's basketball team.

He said the commune had a 50-man security force headed by another of Jones's adopted son, Jim Jr., who was assisted by yet another adopted son, Lou, and a man identified as Joe Wilson.

In the remote jungle community of Matthew's Ridge, the village nearest to Jonestown, Coroner Bacchus began a two-day investigation into whether any of the Jonestown victims did not commit suicide but were murdered.

There have been reports as many as 70 of the bodies showed needle marks, a sign they have been forcibly injected with the fatal cyanide poison. Jones was found shot through the head.

Guayanese authorities also have expressed doubt that the estimated 260 children found dead in the commune could have chosen freely to drink the poison.