

Reports Conflict on Status Of Jones Cult's Finances

By DAVID BINDER

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 15 — A Government official said today that a bank in Zurich had informed the Justice Department that the People's Temple assets, sometimes estimated to total as much as \$8 million, had been removed. The name of the bank could not be learned.

However, there were conflicting reports from different Government agencies about the disposal of the assets. Following queries to the United States Embassy in Bern, the Swiss capital, an Embassy spokesman said late tonight: "We have taken appropriate steps to protect United States interests." Another official, in Washington, said this evening: "The Swiss checked the accounts and they had been emptied."

Earlier, a Justice Department spokesman said that there were reports that Mark Lane, the lawyer, and Terri Buford, formerly a business manager for the People's Temple commune in Jonestown, Guyana, had gone to Switzerland to remove the secret Zurich assets.

The spokesman, Robert Havel, added, however, "I don't know that for a fact."

Lane Denies Reports

Still later tonight, Mr. Lane, returning from Paris, where he said he had spent the last five days, said, "I was not in Switzerland, and Terri was in Memphis." He said it was "a lie" that he had journeyed to Europe to extract the money, and that the bulk of the funds was in a Swiss bank account in Panama.

He then added that "seven-eighths is in Panama and one-eighth in Zurich." The sum in question, he said, was \$7.5 million. He said he had sent an order to the Swiss bank 11 days ago to "freeze the account."

Mr. Lane offered flight numbers and departure and arrival times of his trip to Paris in support of his denial that he had been in Switzerland.

"We're trying to take steps to secure the Government's interests," the Justice Department spokesman said, explaining: "From the outset we said the civil division would see if there was any way to determine whether it could get at the assets of the People's Temple to ease the debt run up in the course of this."

Mr. Havel was referring to outlays by the United States Government in dispatching planes, helicopters and close to 200 Army troops to Guyana to recover the bodies of Representative Leo J. Ryan and the corpses of more than 900 People's Temple members who were poisoned or shot after the legislator was cut down Nov. 18 by gunfire at the Port Kaituma airstrip near Jonestown.

Those costs were tentatively estimated by the Defense and State Department this week to be about \$3.5 million.

No F.B.I. Surveillance

A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation had said that the agency had no indication where Mr. Lane and Miss Buford could be found, adding that

neither had been under surveillance by the F.B.I.

After the Jonestown tragedy, part of which Mr. Lane purportedly learned about from screams and shots he heard while hiding in the jungle near the settlement the night of Nov. 18, the lawyer disclosed that Miss Buford was his client.

He told reporters that she had come to him several weeks before the tragedy as a defector from the cult founded by the Rev. Jim Jones, who had allegedly asked her to poison a former lover of the cult leader living in this country. Mr. Lane also said that he had given protection to Miss Buford by arranging for her to live in various clandestine dwellings in Memphis and Washington before and after the massacre.

The conflicting nature of the reports about the disposition of the secret account funds was explained by a Government official as deriving from the relative freshness of information reaching the State Department and the Justice Department through different channels.

Justice Dept. Versions

The Justice Department maintained that according to its informants, there had been one transfer of money from a Swiss account of the People's Temple last September, but that the remaining funds were "still there," a spokesman said. Another Justice official said that the Zurich bank had been "alerted some time ago" by United States authorities not to allow Jonestown funds to be withdrawn. "As far as I know the money is still in the bank," the second Justice official said.

The disposition of the temple's funds has been a subject of public dispute since Dec. 4, when Charles R. Garry, a California lawyer retained by Mr. Jones to represent him and the cult in 1977, announced he had filed papers in Superior Court in San Francisco to dissolve the People's Temple's corporate entity.

Assistance for Families

Mr. Garry, who had been at Jonestown along with Mr. Lane and Representative Ryan's party, said on behalf of the People's Temple that its remaining assets should be used to recompense families of the victims of the murders and suicides and to pay claims against the corporation.

He had already split with Mr. Lane, who said at the time of the Garry announcement that Miss Buford had informed him the cult's assets were deposited in the name of an elderly woman who had perished at Jonestown. Mr. Lane added at the time that the woman's son and heir wanted to "use all the money to help the surviving members come back."

Neither Mr. Lane nor Mr. Garry indicated at the time how they would respond to United States Government claims on the assets.

Mr. Garry was resting today in Monterey, Calif., where he has been visiting since Wednesday, associates in his law firm said.