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The Warren Report: JOHN SPARROW

suggests that Professor Trevor-Roper has been

Making mysteries

about Oswald

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ENCLOSURE

From the Warden of All Souls
Sjr.—Long controversies, especially when inevitable compression renders argument difficult to follow, are tedious and unedifying. I prolong this one mainly "for the record" and because I think that its subject is of the first importance and that misleading criticism of the Warren Report should not be left unanswered, even if lack of space prevents its being answered fully.

Professor Trevor-Roper has withdrawn quietly from his main positions. He now imputes no bias to the Commission and disclaims any suggestion of "a vast conspiracy"; and he can no longer maintain either his allegation that the Commissioners "never looked beyond" police and F.B.I. testimony or his conclusion that the evidence against Oswald is "no stranger" than that against the F.B.I. and Dallas police. This last conclusion must collapse together with the refuted allegations of "suppression and destruction" on which he based it. His assumption that the police must have suppressed, verbatim notes of Oswald's interrogation turns out to be a myth, like the alleged destruction by the police of the "vital testimony" of a bag; so does the "destruction" by Dr Humes of "all his rough notes"; the notes, like the bag, were in fact preserved and put in evidence.

Concerning his treatment of

evidence, Professor Trevor-Roper says he has had to "eat humble pie." I am afraid I have to offer him a second helping; his further article is as full of inaccuracies as his first.

He suggests two "mysteries":

(1) the "mystery" of Oswald's marksmanship; (2) the "mystery" of the rifle. "They may," he says, "be soluble." He could have solved them himself by referring to the evidence.

(1) He argues that Oswald, firing so rapidly, could not have hit his target three times. He should know that only two of Oswald's shots hit the President. He bases this "impossibility" on the opinion (unsworn) of "a retired ordnance man" (unidentified); he does not mention the sworn contrary evidence.

(2) He asks how Weitzman, who found the rifle, could have mistaken it for a Mauser, when a different make was "clearly inscribed" upon it. In fact, the make was not inscribed on it at all. In any case Weitzman never examined or even touched the rifle; nor did he, as alleged, "report in writing" that it was a Mauser; he simply said that he thought it was one, because "in a glance, that's what it looked like" (as, indeed, it did; Report, p. 645). Again, the "mystery" is a myth.

The same pattern, of inaccuracy and (unintended) misrepresentation recurs in Professor Trevor-Roper's com-

ments on (1) the autopsy report, (2) Brennan's identification of Oswald, and (3) the evidence about Oswald's taking the bag to the Depository.

(1) The autopsy, he says, was "distorted by police evidence," and the autopsy report "clearly stated" that police evidence was used in its compilation. *There is in fact no such statement in the report; the few prefatory sentences describing the assassination are stated to have been based on newspaper (not police) reports which cannot have been seen until after the autopsy (the rough notes of which are available) was completed.*

(2) (a) Brennan, according to Professor Trevor-Roper "could not identify" Oswald at the line-up; he further denies that Brennan ever made a positive identification, thus flatly contradicting the Report. *In fact, Brennan did positively identify Oswald before the Commission as the man he saw fire the shots (p. 145); he swore that he recognized him at the line-up and could have identified him then to the police but was afraid to do so, for reasons which he stated.*

(b) He complains about the "vagueness" of the Report's statement that Brennan's description of Oswald was "most probably" or "primarily" the basis of the police's broadcast message about the suspect. (His innuendo is that they really used another description already in their possession.) The evi-

dence makes it clear that Brennan's description was the ultimate source of the broadcast message; but it was doubtful through how many intermediaries it reached the broadcaster, and this made the Commission, rightly, cautious in their phrasing.

(3) He still insists that there is "no evidence that Oswald took the gun into the Book Depository": "two witnesses," he says, "saw Oswald enter the building. Both of them testified that he carried a parcel, but both equally testified that the parcel was such that it simply could not have contained the gun." In fact only one witness saw him enter the building. True, two witnesses saw him with the bag, and their rough estimates were about six inches short of the true length; but so far from giving "circumstantial, explicit, exclusive" descriptions of it, one said, "I did not pay much attention to the package," and the other had a sight of it only through a window and a "slightly" opened door. The Commission concluded that they simply misjudged the length: after all, they had no reason to look carefully at it.

The alternative hypothesis would require two bags in the Depository — one containing Oswald's rifle, brought in by someone other than Oswald, and a second (which has vanished) brought in by Oswald containing curtain rods (which have vanished also). Two bags

simply do not make sense: one sees why Professor Trevor-Roper was so eager to believe that one of them was a police substitute for the other.

It is only by consistently refusing to envisage the consequences involved by his objection, and neglecting all evidence inconsistent with them, and by treating circumstantial evidence as non-probitives, that Professor Trevor-Roper is able to write as he does. I should like to expand on this but must content myself with two points.

(1) The reports of the Parkland doctors: he persists in the statement that they "regarded the wound in the President's throat as an entrance wound": I can only say that this is simply contradicted by the evidence (Dr Carrico Vol. III, p. 362; Dr Perry Vol III, p. 373). (2) Oswald's motive: "Why should a Marxist, who expressed admiration for Kennedy, . . . plot to kill him?" Oswald's admiration for Kennedy was not, after all, so very deep; asked if he agreed that the President was "Ruffian and a thief" he could only answer that he "would not agree with that particular wording." No: Oswald hated America and all it stood for, and the President represented America. Oswald killed him in pursuance of that paranoid personal feud.

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