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April 6, 1964

Honorable J. Lee Rankin
General Council
The President's Commission
200 Maryland Avenue, N. E.
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Rankin:

Your letter dated March 23, 1964, transmitted specific questions pertaining to the investigation of Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President Kennedy and requested a reasoned response to each question. (U)

At the outset, I wish to emphasize that the facts available to the FBI concerning Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination did not suggest in any way that he was, or would be, a threat to President Kennedy; nor were they such as to require the FBI to inform the Secret Service of his presence in Dallas or his employment at the Texas School Book Depository. (U)

The Oswald case was one of many thousands of investigative matters handled by the FBI. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1963, the FBI handled 633,371 investigative matters in the criminal, civil and security fields. The extent, depth and urgency of each investigation necessarily is dependent on the available facts in the case. A file concerning Oswald was opened at the time newspapers reported his defection to Russia in 1959 for the purpose of correlating information inasmuch as he was considered a possible security risk in the event he returned to this country. When we learned in 1960 that his mother was sending him money, we interviewed her and his brother, Robert Oswald, to determine the reason. Again in 1960 investigation was conducted to determine if he was in Switzerland as we were advised he contemplated enrolling in a college there. The investigation was re-instituted at the time of his return to the United States in 1962, and he was interviewed on two occasions in 1962 in an effort to ascertain if he had been recruited by the Soviet intelligence services and to evaluate him as a possible security risk. (U)

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CLASSIFIED AND EXTENDED BY 5-5 RJO/RA 10/30/79
REASON FOR EXTENSION 2, 3
DATE OF REVIEW FOR DECLASSIFICATION 9/16/84

SEARCHED	INDEXED
SERIALIZED	FILED
APR - 13 1964	
FBI - DALLAS	

DECLASSIFIED BY 65230AT/WP
ON Per DRC Memo 10/2/81

100-10481-49676 (U)

Honorable J. Lee Rankin

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The investigation was continued in 1963 when it was reported that Oswald had corresponded with "The Worker," an east coast communist newspaper, and it was also reported he was engaged in activities on behalf of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC). This investigation was in progress when he was reported in October, 1963, to be in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Mexico, and on November 18, 1963, in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D. C. The purpose of the investigation was to determine the extent of his activities on behalf of the FPCC and the reasons for his contacts with the Soviet Embassies. (S) u

In short, Oswald had gone to the Soviet Union at the age of nineteen and attempted to renounce his American citizenship. He had recanted; his passport had been returned to him and he had been permitted by the Department of State to return to the United States as an American citizen. After his return, he had subscribed to "The Worker," had distributed pamphlets for the FPCC and had admitted publicly that he was a Marxist. He had been in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D. C.; and it was reported, but not confirmed, that he had been in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Mexico. The reason for his contacts with the Soviet Embassies was possibly to obtain visas to re-enter the Soviet Union. As previously indicated, his activities as known at the time of the assassination did not suggest in any way that he was a dangerous subversive; that he was violating any Federal law; or that he represented a threat to the personal safety of the President. There was no basis for the FBI to keep him under constant observation. In the absence of any information showing Oswald to be a possible threat to the President, there was no basis to inform the Secret Service concerning Oswald's presence or employment in Dallas, Texas. (S) u
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The answers to your specific questions are set forth in the attached memorandum with the exception of questions 23, 28 and 29 which are being furnished to you by separate communication since our answers involve classified information. (u)

Sincerely yours,

Enclosure

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