

LETTERS . . .

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Dear Editors:

Vincent Salandria's shrewd analysis of the Warren Report is no doubt one of the more significant contributions to the dissenting literature on the Report and the commission that produced it. Its focus is precise and its tone intelligent.

The trouble is, I fear the approach Salandria takes is simply not going to take us very far. Salandria's essay deals in very difficult legal and ballistical technicalities. It is perfectly legitimate to raise such points and one of the maddening things about the Warren commission is that it has provided for no mechanism to take up and answer doubts like these. But even if Salandria and Lane and the others were to be answered, how many of us could sensibly choose between them and the commission? How many of us have read the report through and in detail? How many of us are going to read through the 26 volumes of the original transcript? How many of us are proficient in the technicalities that would permit us to make an intelligent decision on the ballistical problems Salandria raises? Many of the discrepancies Salandria indicates seem convincing charges against the report. But what I feel I lack, as an amateur in these matters, is some basis of comparison with other cases of this kind. Is ballistics evidence *ever* exact, fully consistent and unambiguous? Or does the Warren report do what might be taken as a reasonably adequate and typical job?

There are other problems. Much of Salandria's argument depends upon the quality and accuracy of the films taken at the scene. Few of us will ever see these films. They may make for very poor evidence and perhaps everybody is more or less guessing about what they have to tell us. As for Oswald's shooting, there are also imponderables here. For all we know, he did very little aiming, but simply got off 2 or 3 lucky shots . . . couldn't have done it again in a million years.

I wouldn't press any of these points. All I'm trying to point out is the difficulty of dealing with evidence of this kind, given its sheer bulk and its specialized character and the many imponderables.

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What we are after in the Kennedy assassination is the truth. And, of course, one way of achieving the truth is through the production of sound evidence. This, however, seems to me the most difficult, if not impossible approach to the case for those of us who are not going to spend our lives studying the assassination. Just as I find myself impressed and nearly convinced by Salandria, so I would probably be impressed and almost convinced the other way by someone defending the Warren report. So how am I to resolve the questions raised?

There are at least two other ways of establishing the truth of an assertion, two ways we are all familiar with and fall back upon most of the time in resolving difficult questions. I feel they are legitimate choices. One is to appeal to authority. The other is to appeal to coherence.

Despite Dave Dellinger's very thoughtful introduction to Salandria's essay, I remain unconvinced that Earl Warren is the sort of man who would perpetrate a fraud of these dimensions. There is simply nothing in the man's whole history to suggest that he would. I remain prepared to be shocked and scandalized if the authority I lean on here collapses. But until some break in the conspiracy, I cannot see my way around trusting the judgment and integrity of Earl Warren.

Supporting this argument, and linked to it, is an argument from coherence. What other theory of the assassination makes sense besides that offered in the Warren report? We must remember that the report offers not only a body of evidence but also an explanatory pattern within which it fits the evidence. Neither Lane nor Salandria offer any pattern within which their evidence coheres. At least not convincingly. For both seem to require that we accept a relationship between Warren, the commissioners, the Dallas cops, Ruby, and anonymous rightwing murderers which simply checks out with nothing I know about any of these figures or groups. Certainly it would make little sense for any such entrenched reactionary group to hazard its existence on a bold assassination that only got it Johnson as President. And whom are we then to believe that Warren and the

whole commission are gambling their reputations to cover up for? The Dallas police?! the John Birch Society?! the Ku Klux Klan?!

Where then does this leave those of us who fall back on arguments from authority and coherence? Must we stand by the Warren report forever? Not at all. There are at least two things that would destroy these arguments. If somebody involved in any conceivable conspiracy begins spilling the beans and impugning the authority we appeal to, then all bets are off. Or, secondly, if there is a sudden swing to the further-right in our politics, something that surpasses anything we might have expected from J.F.K., then a C.I.A. plot becomes more interesting as a possibility.

On the other hand, there is one possibility that will make the Warren commission's interpretation even firmer. If Jack Ruby is executed for the murder of Oswald, then it will be quite hard to discount the official story. For it is impossible to imagine that a character like Ruby will go quietly to his death in order to cover up for anybody who might have employed him to kill Oswald.

Theodore Roszak

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