

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK LANE

Your book's been out in the States now for about five weeks, Mark, and over here it's only just been published, and I see that you're still getting a bad press from one or two quarters: "Time" magazine laid into you with both fists flying, Bernard Levin was hysterical in the "Daily Mail," Alastair Cooke did a very lukewarm "let's all be responsible" kind of piece in the "Guardian," and then there's Pitman in the "Daily Express" and Goodhart in the "Sunday Telegraph" and Devlin in the "Observer." Now, why do you think these people are still telling lies, to put it bluntly, even after all the painstaking documentation by you and a lot of other people which goes right against the established grain as far as the Warren Commission Report is concerned?

Well, I think one has to distinguish one from the other. Bernard Levin is one case; he was so completely and thoroughly committed to the Warren Commission Report at the beginning of the whole affair, and he so vindictively attacked anyone who doubted the conclusions of the Warren Commission Report, that he may well feel that his position has been so absolutely set that it's impossible for him to withdraw from it. But his original endorsement of the Report was based solely upon his abysmal ignorance, and I think his present endorsement of the Report is based upon that as well.

Time magazine, again, was one of those publications which endorsed the Warren Commission Report from the outset, hinting in the process that anyone who doubted its conclusions was some kind of crackpot. The *Guardian* piece, I think, is different from the other two, and it comes a little closer to an analysis of what it is we have to say.

But I think there is a general reluctance, both in America and here in England, to believe the fact that we can have been so monumentally defrauded during the last three years. Oddly enough, I've noticed a change in the approach to the case. First we were told that, while the evidence might not prove Oswald's guilt, and that while one might be able to poke a few minor holes in the evidence at the beginning, nevertheless Chief Justice Earl Warren and his distinguished colleagues had studied the evidence before them, come up with this Report, and therefore their statement, that Oswald was the lone assassin, must be accepted.

But now, with the books out, I think it's impossible for anyone to say that the Warren Commission Report is a sound document. So now we've moved a little further, to stage two. We're no longer asked to have faith in the Warren Commission Report; indeed, a New York newspaper recently referred to it as a "discredited piece of goods," but then went on to say that nevertheless it still believed that Oswald was the lone assassin. On what kind of evidence they base that belief now, I just do not know: there never was any evidence. There was a time when one was supposed to have faith in the Warren Commission, but no one can have that any more; and even those who support the conclusions of the Warren Commission Report, that Oswald was the lone assassin, indicate that they do not do so simply because Earl Warren says so.

I just cannot understand what the basis is for this new stage we've entered; namely, that the Warren Commission did everything wrong, its Report is false, and yet somehow it stumbled upon the correct conclusions. Crazy logic! I suppose it is, again, the difficulty of facing reality and saying: we don't know who killed President Kennedy, the assassins may well be at large, and for some reason which we cannot comprehend, the US government seems totally unconcerned about this. A very difficult area to comprehend, certainly. I think that most people prefer to avoid this question, and the way to avoid it is to remain totally committed, intellectually and emotionally, to the concept that Oswald did it and he did it alone.

There's been a lot of people taking the Warren Commission Report apart during the last two years: Feldman, Russell, Buchanan, Sylvia Meagher in "The Minority Of One," Fred Cook in "The Nation," Vincent Salandria in "Liberation," now your book and Epstein's, and I believe there's another new one coming up soon called "Whitewash" by Harold Weisberg. Since it does seem by now to be so transparently obvious to anyone but a child, I should think, that the Warren Commission Report is, as you said "a discredited piece of goods," what do you think is now going to happen? That is, a certain point has been reached, the demolition job has been done and the Warren Commission Report is in pieces: what do you think are the next immediate steps beyond this?

ROGER BARNARD

I interviewed Mark Lane just before he was due to fly to Sweden; the time factor was a bit worrying, but we talked for about two hours, and covered a wide range of subjects. Apart from the Warren Commission Report and his own book, he spoke about the harassment he's had to put up with in the past two years from the various security, law enforcement, and secret para-military agencies in the States, about the sneers and insults from the mass media directed at him and his work, about the David Mitchell draft-card case, in which he's currently acting as defence counsel, about the sudden shift towards a hard line in American foreign policy which occurred almost exactly after Kennedy's assassination about the personality of Johnson, and about his own fears that Johnson was poised on the brink of a large escalation of the Vietnam war.

I left the interview with the impression that here was a man who, far from being the histrionic exhibitionist he's frequently been made out to be, was quietly confident that he was right, that the facts showed him to be right, and that time would prove him right eventually. The following is a much shortened version of our discussion.

I think we're still at the stage of trying to convince large numbers of people in the States and in Britain that the Report cannot be credited. Once that's been established, we're going to have to try to have the National Archives opened. There's an awful lot of evidence missing, you know: the autopsy photographs, the X-rays, no-one knows where they are; and then there's all the physical evidence, such as the rifle, the bullets, the pistol, none of that is in the Archives. I think our first demand is that all evidence of that nature should be placed in the National Archives, and that everything should be made readily available to all scholars and other persons who are experts in various fields so that they may examine the evidence.

I think there would be sufficient revelations from such careful examinations, so that the next step would then become clear: that is, some method whereby the evidence can be officially evaluated. In order to bring this about, I think there's going to have to be some kind of pressure movement organised in the States. We're giving serious consideration now to bringing back to life our Citizen's Committee Of Enquiry, and organising petition campaigns, and perhaps a march on the National Archives, demanding that they be opened on behalf of the people.

I'm not sure we're quite ready for that. It depends, I think, on how many people decide that they should acquaint themselves with the facts. I've just heard that my book, which has been on the *New York Times* bestseller list twice, first in 9th place and then at 7th, has now moved up to 4th place on the list, an indication that it's now being pretty widely read in the US. I think this will be of great use when we come to the

Mark Lane is that rarity today, a campaigning lawyer. He's seen here lecturing on aspects of Kennedy's assassination, using a blown-up illustration of the relevant area in Dallas. (Photo: Bodley Head.)

next stage, which is trying to secure some action from the American people. I've just been reading Norman Mailer's review of your book in "Village Voice." He takes the line that the seemingly insoluble mystery of the whole affair will be seen to rest, ultimately, on the enigma of "the cop" as a human type, more particularly on the terrifying self-contradictions inherent in the average American cop. Well, obviously the Dallas police were in on the thing at some stage. Now, do you think the entire police force was in on it? I find it difficult myself to believe that an entire city police force was involved; you're not presupposing an entire police conspiracy in Dallas, are you?

No, not at all; the Dallas police turned up some very good evidence immediately, I think, and did an excellent job in many ways. On the scene, Weissman found a piece of skull, he interviewed people behind the wooden fence area, he found a rifle in the building, and so on. So in that case, one would imagine that there were one or two cops in on it who knew what was happening, and who used their influence to smother enquiries perhaps later on. I think that's possible, yes, that's nearer the real explanation. Three questions now. First, since your book is specifically a critique of the

Warren Commission Report, and since the Commission was in Earl Warren's name, have you had any kind of public or private reaction from Warren himself, or indeed from any member of the Commission? Second, have you had any response from any members of the Kennedy family? Third, since the constituent members of the Warren Commission were virtually handpicked by Johnson, it seems to me that from now on, anyone who knocks the Warren Commission Report is, by implication, knocking Johnson. Now, will this unstated assumption have any immediate bad effects upon the state of political dissent in America today? The subtle or overt pressures placed upon even the mildest of dissenters in the States today seem rough enough already; do you think your book is going to goad authority into an even tighter closing of the ranks?

Well, Earl Warren has not responded to any of the attacks that have been made upon the Commission or the Report, and no other member of the Commission has made any comment either. I think there's an agreement among the members of the Warren Commission not to make any comment; yes, that was an agreement entered into just before the Report was published. But it may be that the attacks will become so sharp and widespread that they will be compelled to respond.

As to your second point, one of the main criticisms always made against me is that no member of the Kennedy family has ever supported my work publicly. But as a matter of fact, the Oxford professor, Hugh Trevor Roper, who's very interested in the whole thing and has written the preface to my book, received a telegram from Bobby Kennedy last year which read: "Keep up the good work." And of course, there's this book by William Manchester, called *The Death Of*

A President, which is due out soon, which was written with the express consent and authorisation of Jackie Kennedy and the Kennedy family, and which could be potential dynamite, politically.

Thirdly, you're quite right, it was officially called "The President's Commission On The Assassination Of President Kennedy," the members were chosen by Johnson, and he is responsible, ultimately, for the Commission's Report, he is responsible for the suppression of the evidence, and he is responsible for the fact that vital material in the National Archives cannot be seen or examined: that is an executive decision. Now, the latest polls in the States have shown a sharp decline in Johnson's popularity; and while they've not yet taken a poll on the feelings of the American people relative to the assassination of President Kennedy, I have taken some rather informal polls on my own, because I've been on more than 100 radio and TV

programmes during the last five weeks, and a lot of the programmes were the "phone in and ask a question" type of affair, and over 20% of the people who phoned in to talk to me stated quite categorically that they believed Johnson was behind the assassination. Now, I'm not in a position to pass judgment on their beliefs, or to say whether or not they're right or wrong; but I think it's a good indication of the way in which the whole controversy is gradually becoming more and more a political issue. And I can assure you that Johnson's drop in the polls coming at the same time as the publication of my book and Epstein's, well, the two things are not entirely coincidental. But I think Johnson's running scared on a whole lot of issues right now. As for the pressures on dissent getting worse, I just don't know. Perhaps; but they're so bad already, and the ranks are so closed right now, that I don't see how it's possible. *End*