

2 on Warren Panel Defend Report on Slaying of Kennedy

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WASHINGTON—The first public defense of the Warren Commission Report by members of the seven-man commission itself was made Wednesday in separate statements by Rep. Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.) and Allen Dulles.

The two commission members maintained that critics of the report have produced no new evidence to cast doubt on the report's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of President John F. Kennedy.

Furthermore, Ford charged, the voluminous challenges to the report have done a "disservice" to the memory of the late President.

Breaking a silence that has lasted through months of growing challenge to the commission's findings, Ford, House minority leader, labeled the criticism "speculation."

Question Put to Americans

"It is becoming urgent that the American people ask themselves one key question concerning the criticism currently being leveled at the Warren Commission Report: in all the critiques, has any new evidence been introduced which would cast doubt on the findings of the Warren Commission?" he said. "There is only one answer to the question, and that answer is 'no.'"

There has been much speculation about the commission's report in the past months. What touched it off primarily it was triggered by a student's thesis and by the writings of an attorney whose services were rejected by the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald at the time of the Warren Commission hearings.

That speculation of this kind should be used to undermine the conscientious and thorough work of the Warren Commission and its

the memory of the late President Kennedy."

Commenting on this statement, Dulles said:

"I am in complete agreement with Congressman Gerald Ford that no new information has been produced by any of the critics of the Warren Commission Report which could reasonably cast any doubts upon the findings or conclusions of that report."

List Other Members

In addition to Dulles and Ford, the members of the now disbanded commission were Chief Justice Earl Warren, Sens. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) and John Sherman Cooper (R-Ind.), Rep. Hale Boggs (D-La.) and John J. McCloy, New York lawyer and former head of the World Bank.

Ford's aides said he became the first member of the commission to speak out in defense of the report because of the pressure from the press for comment on the commission's critics here and abroad.

It is no secret in Washington that various members of the commission have been boiling with indignation at the critics and dismayed at the doubts that have been planted in the public mind by critical books and articles.

Some of the members at least were badly jolted by the findings of the Louis Harris Poll, published last Monday, that by a ratio of 3 to 2 the American people reject the principal finding of the report that Oswald was the lone assassin. Harris reported that the people have deep and abiding doubts about the official explanation of the assassination in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963.

Privately, members have charged that criticism of the Warren report have been authored by persons who had no great competence on the subject of the assassination nor

anything like the means of investigation that were at the disposal of the commission.

When Ford spoke in his statement of a student whose thesis had touched off last summer's wave of challenges to the Warren report, he was referring to Jay Epstein, now a graduate student at Harvard University. His thesis, written while doing earlier graduate work at Cornell University, was published as a book called "Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth."

The book again raised the question of whether there was not another gunman in addition to Oswald. It also criticized the Warren Commission's methods and its objectivity.

Ford's mention of the attorney "whose legal services were rejected by the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald" referred to Mark Lane, whose book "Rush to Judgment" is also deeply critical of the commission.

Since the Warren Commission's work was quasi-judicial, the chief justice has declined to take public notice of any of the criticism. In the absence of his comment and in view of the fact that the commission has dispersed, leaving no official spokesman or headquarters, the members tolerated criticism in private until Ford and Dulles finally spoke out.