

Warren Report Row Stems From Commission Makeup

LAT-1/8/67 BY JOSEPH KRAFT

In thinking about the Warren Commission it is useful to have in mind a sense of the anatomy of all Presidential commissions. For the whitewash argument, now freshened by the death of Jack Ruby, is largely the product of naive people ascribing sinister motives to what are only weaknesses inherent in the way Presidential commissions are appointed and do their work.

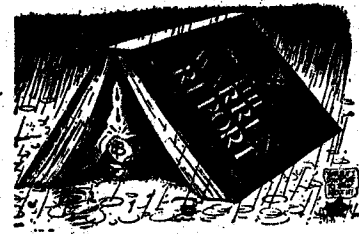
Presidential commissions exist for the purpose of laying before an uninstructed mass audience clear and credible accounts of inordinately complex and controversial matters. Their subject matter is never something easily provable. They deal with things hard to resolve—things like military conscription, or crime, or Pearl Harbor, or the assassination of a President.

Celebrated representatives of important interest groups—what Yeats called "sixty-year-old, smiling public men"—inevitably find representation on all Presidential commissions. It is essential to enlist their partici-

terests of the land—its sections, its parties, its branches of government—were named to the commission. The staff included some of the most hard-working, brilliant young lawyers ever to come to Washington.

The real trouble with the Warren Report is that the commission and the staff were so good that they took on the quality of separate beings, divorced and apart. The issues identified and isolated by the staff were not squarely confronted by the commission. And that explains the one weakness in the commission report that has proved central to the case—the failure to come out unambiguously on the issue of whether President Kennedy and Gov. Connally of Texas were hit by a single or separate bullets.

The staff was in no doubt about the need to settle that issue decisively. Its most intelligent members were unanimous in believing that the governor was struck by a bullet that had first hit the President. But the staff never had a chance to present its views in their full cogency to the commission.



The roof leaks. Cartoon by Oliphant

pation, for their disavowal would make the commission report not credible.

Between the public men on the commission proper, and the commission staff, there is inevitably bound to be tension. While the commission members tend to be full of honors, years and other preoccupations, commission staffs tend to be peopled by obscure young men, with the emotional drive and intellectual capacity to become singularly well-versed in the subject at hand. A commission staff is inevitably far more knowledgeable, far more analytic, far more willing to consider new approaches, in a word, far more "with it," than any commission.

The Warren Commission, it is now evident, presented the features of all other Presidential commissions in supreme degree. Olympian figures representing the highest in-

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Connally thought, and testified that he had been hit by a separate bullet. Some of the southern members of the commission were apparently chary of hurting his feelings. Not knowing the full force of the argument for the one-bullet theory, they leaned toward the two-bullet theory. In the end, the commission report straddled the question.

By straddling the issue, by not confronting the hard choice implicit in the work of the staff, the commission opened the door to most of the troubles that have since dogged its report. For absent the one-bullet theory, it is a question whether a single man could have got off the shots within the known time span of the shooting. And that question leads to the idea that there might have been accomplices and then to the suspicion of a conspiracy and a whitewash.

Visions of conspiracy and whitewash, however, are not required to explain the flaws found in the Warren Report by its critics. The major weakness has a natural explanation in the way Presidential commissions work. And to me this is one, among many, reasons for being skeptical about the report for an official reopening.