

ON THE RIGHT -----by William F. Buckley, Jr.



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SHOOT DOWN THE WARREN COMMISSION?

The literature of skepticism concerning the official history of the assassination of President Kennedy grows and grows. For a while the Warren Commission benefited from the ideological cast of the criticism. In Europe, during 1964, it was positively *infra dig* in liberal circles, to believe that Mr. Kennedy had actually been shot down by Oswald the Red. In France particularly, where the salons cackle with amusement at fundamentalist Americanism as exemplified for instance by the conspiracy-theories of Mr. Robert Welch of the John Birch Society, the sophisticates were seriously explaining to each other that Kennedy was the victim of an elaborate plot involving the Dallas Police, Texas billionaires, Lyndon Johnson, and the Widow McCarthy. I mean, in all seriousness.

While the criticism of the Warren Commission lay in the hands of such obvious kooks, there was nothing very much to wonder about; but in recent months the skepticism has moved from such as Thomas Buchanan to other critics, e. g. Mr. Lawrence Brown writing in *Triumph Magazine*, and Mr. Epstein writing for the *Viking Press*, and Mr. Francis Russell in *National Review* -- the effect of whose criticisms of the Warren Commission leads to one, although not necessarily the second, conclusion.

The conclusion which is intellectually responsible as a result of the probing of these critics is not so much the rejection of the conclusions of the Warren Commission, which would be premature, but a reevaluation of the Commission's competence. That is to say, the critics appear to have made the case cogently that the Commission showed itself more concerned to substantiate the national postulates about the assassination -- that Oswald was the executioner, and the lone executioner -- than to investigate and assimilate all the discoverable evidence; presumably for fear that, properly weighed, such evidence might tend to different conclusions.

One asks hastily: why might the Warren Commission fear other conclusions? The answer to which is possibly alarmist, though not necessarily so. Going from one end of the spectrum, to the other, the Warren Commission might sub-consciously have feared to discover a) that Oswald executed Mr. Kennedy acting upon a directive of an agent of the Communist Party; or z) at the other end of the imaginative spectrum, that Oswald executed Kennedy at the instigation of Dallas right-wingers.

In the event of a), the popular indignation of the people could -- conceivably -- have triggered a world war. In the event of z), it could have triggered a national pogrom against right-wingers. And even in between a) and z) -- a finding that Oswald was not the executioner; or that if he was the executioner, that

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he had accomplices, might have resulted in a public torment at not knowing who-all were responsible for the awful deed -- a traumatizing torment leading to suspicion, resentment, frustration.

The gist of the responsible criticisms of the Warren Commission is that it was obsessed with the sense of obligation to tuck in the neat solution that Oswald was the sole assassin, and that he was driven by a private madness unrelated to the policies of the Soviet Union, American power-politics, oil millionaires, domestic-fascists, or whatever. One suspects, for instance in the writings of Messrs. Mark Lane and Lawrence Brown, that they are themselves in thrall to their own chosen theories, if not as to Who Did It, at least to the theory that Others Than Oswald were necessarily involved.

An advocate of the insufficiency of the Warren Commission tends to get carried away into the grip of alternative hypotheses; tends, that is to say, to lose sight of the fact that it is not necessary, in order to document that the Warren Commission did its job inadequately, to show that in fact the culprits were other than those incriminated by the Warren Report.

My own judgment is that the presumptions of the Warren Commission are still plausible. But it does seem that the better part of wisdom is to stand by to reactivate the Warren Commission, or at least spokesmen for the Commission. And the best way to do that, it seems to me, was suggested by Mr. Richard Goodwin, formerly of President Kennedy's staff. His proposal is that a panel of respectable and qualified gentlemen be established to winnow the vast amount of material, intending to come up with one of the following conclusions: 1) that the Warren Commission investigations do in fact contain the evidence necessary to dispose of the doubters' doubts; 2) that the Warren Commission's investigations, ^{although they} do not successfully cope with the anomalies unearthed by the critics, nevertheless present such irrefutable evidence to back the conclusion that Oswald was the lone killer, as to make unnecessary any further investigation. Or, of course, 3) that the Warren Commission's investigations have been proved inadequate, and although there is as yet no evidence that Oswald had an accomplice or that he acted as someone else's agent, neither is the evidence to the contrary conclusive: and investigations should resume.

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