



Voice: Fred W. McDarrath

MARK LANE & HIS PAPERS

Mark Lane: Can America Think the Unthinkable?

by Jack Newfield

A radical may be a prophet or a psychopath, a hero or a thief. History offers the lessons of Marcus Garvey, who was dishonest, and Henry Wallace, who was foolish. It also offers us Henry David Thoreau and W. E. B. DuBois, who were prophets, and Joe Hill and Eugene Debs, who were heroes. Fidel Castro spoke for all radicals when he told his judge in Havana in 1956, "History will absolve me."

With the killing of Malcolm X, Mark Lane became the most dangerous radical in America. He is dangerous because, if he is right in his premise of the Kennedy assassination, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the FBI, and the press are wrong, then the mind recoils from the implications. What paranoid theory of conspiracy then becomes impossible? The overthrow of Nkrumah, the murder of Malcolm X, the death of Adlai Stevenson, they all enter the subterranean labyrinth of James Bond. The structure of rational politics rests on the rock of the Warren Commission Report. And Mark Lane says that rock is a fraud.

Five years ago Lane, witty, theatrical, was the golden boy

of New York Reform politics. He was jailed as a freedom rider in Mississippi and hailed for his expose of the fallout-shelter racket. He was the first real radical to appear on the stage of municipal politics since Vito Marcantonio.

Bobbing Up

Then, in 1962, Lane overreached. He sought a congressional nomination, failed, and immediately disappeared from the mainstream, bobbing up sporadically at far left rallies. After the assassination of President Kennedy, he reappeared as counsel for Marguerite Oswald, mother of the alleged assassin. Then he again vanished from the headlines.

There were rumors he was writing a book on the Warren Report. A library of books were published shortly after on the assassination, but nothing by Lane. Silence again. A few months ago someone chalked "Mark Lane Lives" on a billboard on 8th Street.

Lane has now reappeared in the wings of the stage of history. He has in his three-year struggle to find a publisher for his book on the assassination. He is living with his beautiful Danish wife in a sublet on Spring Street waiting for the explosion that is sure to come with the publication of his "Rush to Judgment" on August

15 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Living on money borrowed from his family, speaking to any audience—collegiate or night club—that would listen, Lane has skittered around the globe for three years. He was lionized as a prophet in England, France, and Scandinavia. In this country he was followed by some, but ignored or mocked by most. He has appeared on television networks all over Europe, but never in this country. He has been praised by even centrist intellectuals on the Continent, but attacked here by Dwight Macdonald, I. F. Stone, and the New York Post.

Spiked by Desk

"Only Murray Kempton and The Village Voice have given me fair treatment here," he says. He tells sadly of how 107 journalists covered his Town Hall debate in 1964 with Melvin Belli, but how only The Voice printed a word. He tells how he was forced off the Les Crane network television show at the last minute, and how a friendly New York Times reporter had written five pieces on his crusade, which were all ultimately spiked by the desk.

Lane's book, whose galleys I read in England last month, is written in judicial, understated, impressively footnoted prose. There is none of the self-drama and flamboyance that marked his political career. No conspiracy theory of the assassination is offered in the book. There is no speculation about who may have killed Kennedy. Based on 1500 interviews, seven trips to Dallas, and two years of reading the 26 volumes of testimony before the Warren Commission, it concludes that Oswald killed neither the President nor Police Officer J. D. Tippett. The book opens with an introduction by Tory historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, and the pre-publication publicity features a quotation of endorsement by Professor Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Turned Down

The former East Harlem Assemblyman began his odyssey in December of 1963 when he wrote an article criticizing the procedures on the weekend of the assassination of the Dallas County

police and prosecutor's office. He said that it was only after the Nation and the Progressive and "at least four other liberal publications turned it down" that he gave the piece to the leftist National Guardian.

Although "grateful" to the Guardian for printing the piece, Lane knew it would be dismissed as leftist propaganda in a publication of little journalistic credibility for the vast majority of people.

Soon Lane was involved in the case full-time, visiting Dallas,

testifying before the Warren Commission, speaking and writing. Casual interest became an obsessive mission. Lane began to compare Oswald to Dreyfus and Sacco and Vanzetti, and he seemed to see himself as Zola.

The obvious next step was to publish a book on the assassination. Grove Press gave the embattled Lane a \$3500 advance and a year's deadline to produce it. But the crusader worked slowly, reading his way carefully through thick volumes of testimony released over the year after the event. Other books, more sensational, more speculative, had been

and he despaired of publishing the book in his native land.

Bodley Head, at that point, took up the mission to secure an American publisher, trying Viking first. Viking sent the manuscript to Murray Kempton and Dwight Macdonald for evaluation. Kempton urged publication. Macdonald, who had already assailed Lane in Esquire, came out against it

published in a rush. Lane says that on the day the contract expired, Grove Press called him and cancelled it after he told them he was still reading testimony.

Cycle Repeated

Then the journey began, from one publishing house to the next: hope, then frustration, a cycle repeated a dozen times. In the fall of 1964 Lane went to Denmark, married, settled there for six months, continually revising his manuscript, treating it almost as a diary.

In the summer of 1965 Lane and his bride went to England, where Bertrand Russell displayed considerable interest in the case. Then, Bodley Head, a distinguished two-century-old publishing firm, agreed to do the book for the Commonwealth countries. But, after countless rejections, Lane

and he carried the day.

Meanwhile Arthur Cohen, executive vice president of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, heard about the floating manuscript, phoned Bodley Head in London, and in four hectic days managed to convince the executives of Holt to pay \$16,000 for the American rights.

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Cohen, whom Lane calls "my saviour," not only got his company to buy the book, but also agreed to a massive publicity build-up and a first printing of 30,000. Now Lane is like a man poised on a stick of dynamite. A Book of the Month club has bought the book, a Boston paper has purchased serial rights, Esquire is preparing a piece on Lane, and Holt's publicity department is being deluged with interview requests.

Lane remains skeptical. He is afraid that the media will focus attention on books that make technical criticisms of the Report, like Edward Epstein's just published "Inquest," at the expense of his root-and-branch attack on the premise of the Report. He also worries about getting fair reviews.

Are men like Lane prophets or psychopaths? They have been both. As Castro suggests, perhaps only history can make a detached judgment. At least now Lane will have his hearing, and America will have to confront the unthinkable.