

SOVIET UNION:

Banned in Moscow

Perhaps nowhere in the world has the United States Government considered it so important to tell its version of the assassination of John F. Kennedy as in the Soviet Union. It only to quell Kennedy fears that the death of John Kennedy might somehow portend the emergence to power in the U.S. of "reactionary forces" implicitly hostile to the Soviet Union. Washington sped 80 English-language copies of the Warren Commission report to Moscow for distribution to top Soviet leaders as soon as the text became available two years ago. Later, the USIS prepared a handsome Russian-language edition, and this summer the U.S. Embassy in Moscow began distributing it free of charge to members of the Soviet Politburo, editors, legal experts and libraries.

All told, roughly half of the 1,400 copies of the report in the embassy's stockpile had been handed out when, two weeks ago, the Soviet Foreign Minister abruptly "invited" U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler to stop distributing the document in the U.S.S.R. The reason for the ban, the Russians explained, was that the book was "slamming" to the Soviet people. And, indeed, the Warren report's lengthy description of Lee Harvey Oswald's two-year stay in Minsk—and his subsequent disillusionment with the Soviet Union—may well have offended Kremlin sensibilities. But it seemed more than a coincidence that the Moscow newspaper Trud recently printed an article rehashing Communist speculation that President Johnson had a hand in the assassination. In their irritation with Mr. Johnson over Vietnam, Soviet leaders were apparently willing to use any old stick to beat him with—and they did not want mere facts to get in their way.

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