

75

**BOOKS**

**WILLIAM M. TURNER**

S.F. BAY GUARDIAN  
22 JAN 78  
P. 18

**Was Oswald  
in league  
with the KGB?**

**LEGEND: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald.** By Edward Jay Epstein. Reader's Digest Press/McGraw Hill, \$12.95.

When a magazine puts up the extraordinary sum of half a million dollars to subsidize the research for a book, it undoubtedly expects a fair return for its money. In *Legend*, Reader's Digest, Inc. did not receive the bombshell it bargained for. Nothing in the book is sensationally new, the work being largely an expansion of material published years ago. But the strongly anti-Communist management of Reader's Digest may have gotten its money's worth in the book's bias. By an artful selection and arrangement of facts, author Epstein propounds the theory that Lee and Marina Oswald were in Dallas in 1963 under the auspices of the Soviet secret police (KGB), and that Lee Oswald single-handedly assassinated President Kennedy in the fantasy-hope of being welcomed as a hero in Fidel Castro's Cuba.

Epstein stops short of claiming that either the KGB or Cuban intelligence deliberately arranged the assassination, but the implication is clear that Oswald was driven to the deed by a vision of his own role in the future of world Marxism. Where his book takes a Byzantine twist—and this is the original part

of it—is in its contention that Oswald was in the clutches of the KGB during his 1959-62 stay in the Soviet Union, and was dispatched by the KGB for an unspecified intelligence assignment in the United States. Following the assassination the KGB tried desperately to disassociate itself from Oswald by sending a bogus defector into the hands of the CIA, a defector who portrayed Oswald as a mystery man even to the Soviets.

The story of the putative defector, Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko, reads like something straight out of *The Looking Glass War*. Four weeks after the assassination, Nosenko got in touch with CIA agents in Geneva, offering to defect. After talking about miscellaneous KGB operations, he startled the CIA men by revealing that he had worked in the American Department of the KGB, in which capacity he personally supervised the file on Oswald, who had made a noisy display of defecting to the USSR upon his arrival in Moscow. Nosenko asserted that the KGB had never attempted to recruit Oswald, and in fact viewed him with suspicion. But after Nosenko had been exhaustively interrogated in the United States, one CIA faction concluded that he was a "disinformation" agent sent to plant a "legend" to steer the Warren Commission away from the KGB connection.

At this point, Epstein writes, the interests of the KGB and the FBI "became strangely intertwined." J. Edgar Hoover made a private decision that his bureau had exhibited "gross incompetence" in failing to keep track of Oswald after his return to the United States, and that if a link between the accused assassin and the KGB were established, the FBI's reputation would be severely damaged. Nosenko was never questioned by the Warren Commission, whose report discounted any foreign control of Oswald.

Epstein views this as a coverup engineered not only by the FBI but by a group of CIA officials who were convinced Nosenko was sincere. His principle source for the coverup theory

Is James Jesus Angleton, at the time the CIA's chief of counterintelligence and leader of the faction that believed Nosenko was a double agent. The intramural fight pitted Angleton, a hardliner with the incongruous hobby of raising orchids, against William Colby, who believed Nosenko was telling the truth. In 1974, Colby, after winning a power struggle with Angleton for the directorship of the CIA, leaked Angleton's complicity in illegal mail opening to the New York Times. Forced into retirement, Angleton may be getting back at Colby through *Legend*. In addition to the insistence that Oswald was under KGB control, the book vents a nasty innuendo that Colby was a KGB "mole" (agent in place) in a position to protect Nosenko.

Epstein struggles hard to validate the Angleton theory, so hard in fact that he comes off as more propagandist than scholar in his selective interpretation of facts. For example, he sees the array of perquisites that Oswald enjoyed in Minsk—an apartment with a choice view, enough money to buy prized durable goods—as evidence that the American was on the KGB payroll, not that the Soviets might simply be pampering him to obtain the propaganda value of a satisfied defector.

What Epstein fails to point out is that Oswald also told this fellow worker, a Russian-speaking ex-Army intelligence officer: "All the time I was in Minsk I never saw a vapor trail." One might logically deduce from this that Oswald was a CIA operative, sent to the Soviet Union to see whether U-2 contrails were visible from the ground. In fact, during his hitch in the Marine Corps, Oswald was an air control specialist at the Atsugi, Japan base used by American U-2 spy planes flying over China and the USSR. It is not implausible that his subsequent "defection" to Russia was arranged by the CIA, which was intensely interested in what the Soviets knew about the high-flying craft.

Oswald's ostentatious pro-Castro activities in New Orleans in the summer of 1963

are similarly open to alternative interpretations. Epstein takes the position that Oswald was in fact a dedicated Marxist, now disillusioned with the Soviet brand and sampling the Cuban variety. The purpose of the activities, he says, was to set up a track record of partisanship toward Cuba that would earn him a visa to that country. But Oswald's hopes were dashed when an obviously suspicious Cuban consul in Mexico City refused to issue a visa immediately, and Oswald left in a huff.

This behavior can also be construed as an attempt by Oswald to get into Cuba to assassinate Fidel Castro under manipulation by the CIA-Mafia plotters who were getting increasingly desperate after repeated failures. (At the same time in Miami, a soldier of fortune was offered \$90,000 to bomb the Presidential Palace in Havana while Castro was in it.) At the moment, in fact, the House Select Committee on Assassinations is retracing the Jim Garrison steps of a decade ago, with particular emphasis on Oswald's ties to anti-Castro activist David Ferrie, his former Civil Air Patrol commander, who worked for both the CIA and Mafia chieftain Carlos Marcello.

*Legend* has to be one of the strangest books on the assassination library shelf, and the question can legitimately be raised whether the CIA—or at least the hard-line Angleton faction still entrenched in the agency—counts Epstein as one of its journalistic "assets." From recent revelations we know that the agency utilized friendly journalists to deprecate critics of the Warren Commission, and Epstein's past works on the subject and the CIA's interests have, to paraphrase the author, "become strangely intertwined." His first book, *Inquest*, scored the methodology of the Warren Commission but agreed with its conclusion that there had been no domestic conspiracy. Another, *Counterplot*, was an unscrupulous attack on Jim Garrison, who contended that renegade CIA elements were implicated.

If there is a "legend" here, it seems to be Epstein's. ■