

Garrison and Warren: Anything in Common?

When, in February of this year, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison assured the public that he had "solved" the enigma of the Kennedy assassination and gave us his word of honor that he would soon make arrests and obtain convictions, he certainly sounded like a sincere man who knew what he was talking about. Not only his personal style was reassuring but also his speaking, not as a private man or amateur researcher, but as a law officer. Here seemed to be a man who had no ideological incentive to reject the Warren Commission's findings and whose conclusions derived from no critical general view of the U.S. power structure; here was a cop who, having come across criminal evidence, was determined to proceed professionally. Mr. Garrison was no social philosopher, no social critic, and no political dissenter. He was a district attorney and acted as such. And as such, he seemed to be adding a new dimension to the dissent from the Warren findings: positive evidential material was soon to supercede negative analytical conjecture.

Promises on record, the district attorney made his first move by arresting Clay Shaw on a charge of conspiracy to assassinate the late President. In going about justifying this charge, Mr. Garrison appeared to be proceeding with all too understandable caution. Certainly, he would not let haste ruin his case. Certainly, he would not let premature legal steps offer an opportunity for the enemies of truth to block its exposure. These imputations appeared to justify a patiently tolerant attitude toward Mr. Garrison. When he produced witnesses of as questionable a character and caliber as Perry Russo and Vernon Bundy, one "knew" by instinct that this was not all the district attorney had up his sleeve and that he was merely exposing the non-essential, perhaps even expendable, part of his evidence. The real, overwhelming truth was yet to come: Garrison, while in court presenting the fringes, must be mastering such an expose as would preclude failure by intrigue, suppression, or violence. The Big Case was in Garrison's hands and before long would be fully known.

Then factors began to emerge that did not quite square with this view of the Garrison investigation and the presumptions that formed a part of it. Days of waiting for the Big Disclosure grew into weeks and then months. The convergence of disquieting symptoms sharpened an observer's critical faculty in reviewing Garrison's performance and in registering its new phases. The reliability of new witnesses was by no means better than that of the first ones; characters were paraded each of whom was in one way or another vulnerable to manipulation or blackmail. Their thin web first assumed to be a mere fringe of the body of Garri-

son's evidence was now emerging as its heart. There were signs of growing desperation on his part, such as distressingly frequent accusations of attempts to influence or outright coerce witnesses. The district attorney's "scientific" methods, such as administration of sodium pentothal, use of hypnosis and lie detectors on witnesses, hardly bespoke a man aware of the differences between scientifically determined evidence and black magic.

Cop or Researcher?

At the same time, Mr. Garrison was ever more heavily relying on independent, private researchers of the published evidence. These people fall basically into two categories: students of the released Hearings and Exhibits of the Warren Commission and other related evidence, and political hypothesizers. Garrison wanted them all in his corner and carefully cultivated their friendship and support. He has been doing this with such determined solicitude as to suggest dependence on their work. Indeed, he seems to have become one of them.

Evidential analysis and informed speculation are, of course, perfectly legitimate, nay, indispensable, preoccupations in criminal cases, especially when involving the most powerful country's most powerful man. Those who have undertaken these ostracism-inviting tasks will eventually be thanked by historians. But Mr. Garrison's own emergence in this capacity is disillusioning. For he was not to be a social critic, or even an analyst of the 26 Warren Commission volumes; he had promised us not speculation, however intelligent and plausible, but an official investigator's solution of a mystery, prosecution of the guilty, and vindication of evidence in due process of law.

The more Garrison was courting the independent researchers, displaying equal attention for serious and frivolous people, the more did they reciprocate. Often mocked and ostracized, many of these individuals derived desperately needed reassurance from personal closeness to a man in office and power. Flattered, some did not remember to demand from Garrison and his evidence such rigorous standards of objectivity as they criticized the Warren Commission for not having. They were basking in the power attractions of the only law enforcement officer in the country who would show them respect, and that was enough for some, at least, to be less procedurally meticulous and ethically demanding than they had been when facing adversaries.

Forgetting that at times opposition to opposition may be justified, or at least coincidental with justified rejection, these people interpreted each sign of official displeasure with Garrison as an indication of his being on the right track. Why would anyone be against him, unless he posed the danger of exposure? By this logic, it could perhaps even be argued that the real Kennedy assassins were the Warren Report critics . . . But once emotional investments have been made, the logic of arguments had no unlimited reign. And should need arise, some of these people, eternally grateful to their psychological benefactor, will carry the remains of his sadly deceased "solution" not to its de-

served grave but into the mausoleum of imaginary martyrdom.

In the meantime, real disasters have struck Garrison's case. His claim of having deciphered the code of Ruby's telephone number in Oswald's notebook, and in Shaw's, turned out to be based on a misreading of the alleged code. Informed of this, Garrison, even while privately indicating awareness of error, did not forego contrary public claims. Then came the defection of William Gurvich, his chief investigator. Garrison's response lacked in integrity, the D.A. no longer acknowledging the defector's previously acknowledged position on his staff.

A Scoop or a Trap?

There are several criteria of judgment which Mr. Garrison cannot escape. He publicly gave his word of honor; he must keep it or be compromised. Procrastination may not serve as escape from responsibility, and no district attorney may be allowed infinite time to substantiate or withdraw his charges. Mr. Garrison's trust account is exhausted, and no latitude may any longer apply on grounds that it would take propitious circumstances for him to share his "solution" with the public. Great as Mr. Garrison may emerge as a philosopher, analyst, conjecturer, or hypothesizer of the Kennedy assassination, this could not substitute for the effective police investigator he had committed himself to be. It is time for Mr. Garrison either to prove himself in this latter capacity or to disappear from public life as relatively gracefully as is possible for a punctured windbag.

Mr. Garrison's preoccupation with the Kennedy assassination coincides with what appears to have been an extensive campaign of an unidentified source to plant misleading "scoops" with many interested researchers and publications. Researcher after researcher was approached by mysterious characters, each claiming to have first-hand, or at least second-hand, information. Elaborate tales were told, in some instances by people with considerable mastery of impersonation and impressive acquaintance with the voluminous assassination evidence. Their eagerness to be "used," in dramatic press conferences, for instance, was only thinly veiled in a pretense of being in personal danger. This publication, as others that have been exposed to these phony characters, concluded that they had been trained and delegated by some authority to trick the critics of the Warren Report into compromising themselves and their criticism.

It is conceivable that Jim Garrison did fall into the trap which other people were smart enough to avoid. It is equally conceivable that once publicly committed, he kept sinking into the trap ever deeper, becoming a case rather than solving one. But whether or not such is in fact the genesis of the Garrison investigation, more than Mr. Garrison's personal future depends on its outcome. Having received more public notice than any other non-believer in Warren, Mr. Garrison, if finally compromised, may well take with him a great deal of the popular distrust of the solitary assassin theory. However unfounded such a reaction, it is nonetheless likely. Indeed, such precisely may

have been the intent of whomever got Garrison into these deep waters in the first place.

But no single individual should be allowed to serve as a foolproof lightning rod for the Warren story tellers. However counter-productive his involvement in the case, this does not add even one iota of evidence in favor of the Warren Report. That tale is discredited irrelevant of whether or not the Warren critics will ever produce *positive* evidence as to what really happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Whether positive evidence will be produced does not merely depend on the astuteness or correctness of the Warren critics. Nor does it depend exclusively on its potential availability. It also depends on the effectiveness of the conspiracy to preclude disclosure. Other historic conspiracies are known to have remained effective for a period of four, fourteen, or forty years. Some probably remained effective forever, for who could allege that every last political assassination in history has in the end been resolved? The fact that Jim Garrison may not have resolved this particular one, least of all suggests that Earl Warren has. The Warren theory is discredited by virtue of its own presumptions, inconsistencies, and fallacies. Even at worst, Garrison's investigation may merely turn out to be as compromised as Warren's investigation has been.

Poetry for All Seasons

Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky publicly expressed bitterness over the cancellation of his June visit to the United States by the Union of Soviet Writers. His is not the only visit cancelled. The others include those by

U.S. tour, November 1966: On stage—Yevgey Yevtushenko, in audience—U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.



the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera companies, the Russian Festival of Music and Dance, the Moscow Circus, Soviet delegates to the 27th International Orientalists Congress at Ann Arbor, Mich., and athletic teams. The Soviets have also barred some of their would-be American counter-visitors.

Mr. Voznesensky's bitterness reminds us of that with which some American friends of the USSR reacted to our own criticism of friendly visits by Soviet cultural personalities even while the host country kept increasing its Vietnamese mass murder. One publication found our criticism to have been "tragic" and an obstacle to that "unity of all progressive forces" on which an "end to the barbarous war in Vietnam" depends. A historian-turned-poet published a "poem," in which he not only asked us, "Is all the world your enemy/Mr. Editor?" but also answered that this editor is not so lonely after all, having "join (ed) that unholy chorus" of "Billy Hargis, Edgar Hoover, H. L. Hunt." The poet-for-a-moment then defined our criticism of Yevtushenko's U.S. visit as a "stab in the back" of a "comrade whose face is to the enemy." (Smiling and reciting?)

Our critics have so completely committed themselves to the indispensability of Soviet cultural visits that, if they have any integrity, they should now join Voznesensky in denouncing those who have cancelled his and others' visits. They should castigate them for having joined Billy Hargis and that ilk . . . It is a safe guess, however, that they will do nothing of the sort. On the contrary, they will undoubtedly continue to praise the Soviet authorities even if for reasons precisely opposite to the ones they invoked for past praise. In fact, no sooner has the preceding sentence been written than we encountered another poem on the subject. This one was addressed not to ourselves, but to Voznesensky. It admonishes the Russian to "stay home . . ."

A juxtaposition of a few lines from the two above mentioned poems is interesting, because, although motivationally identical, the elapse of a few months between them accounts for directly contradictory admonishments.

From "Letter to a Certain Editor"
by Oakley Johnson
(*New World Review*, January 1967)

The Far Right patriots . . .
They say (of course!) go home
They want Yevtushenko kept out
They want a law
They'd like to drive him out
And you, Mr. Editor
With all the bravura of your eloquence
Join that unholy chorus?
You join Billy Hargis, Edgar Hoover,
H. L. Hunt?

Oh, I know
You escaped from a Concentration Camp . . .

But once joining H. L. Hunt has apparently become acceptable, this poem was published:

From "Letter to Voznesensky"
by S. A.

(*The Worker*, Sept. 3, 1967)

The C.I.A. loves you. Its eyes warm you
until you begin to melt and lose form.
You are a poet, but you do not know the world.

You are innocent. The United States will applaud you.

Rush your cheeks—not with "shame"

but with pride;

they will make you feel important as the glow that has just routed the night—show you off before television; pick the softest straw for your bed; accommodate you with beautiful women . . . Stay home, my

wealthy friend, you are no match for

Madison Avenue . . .

It grieves me to part thus, but, dear poet Voznesensky, in reading you I smell the reek of Svetlana.

With all this poetry at its best around, sensitive cords in our own soul have been moved:

With everybody so very lyrical perhaps also I may be forgiven for succumbing to the Muse.

By God, I too am confused as to who was good, who cynical when urging, "Stay home, refuse!"

I said, don't recite to McNamara, so they called me every bad name.

Now you are compared to Svetlana for wanting to come here to declaim; they demote, defame, insult you, Andrei, for keeping yesterday's order today.

You are so right, Oh, poet Andrei, if virtue it was, why isn't it today?

But think hard and you'll comprehend that in your country, as in my own land, the people are there merely to obey orders only leaders need understand.

And thus it turns out that we beat our critics to being right, except that in being right we were wrong; and they turn out to have been wrong even if in so being they were right. Which is by no means the last mix-up in tenses on the part of authors whose very last, and least, ambition is to author what they are credited with authoring. But less professional, if still automatic, supporters of one political force or another may try to realize the absurdity of situations in which they put themselves while retired from *personal* thought and conscience.

Prevented from a second U.S. tour, Andrei Voznesensky accused the Union of Soviet Writers of "Lies, lies, lack of decency and lies."

