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ATROCIOUS HISTORY

(by Thomas Stamm)

Carlyle thought great men make history. Marx taught man makes his own history but not out of the whole cloth. The Communist Manifesto declared: "The history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles."

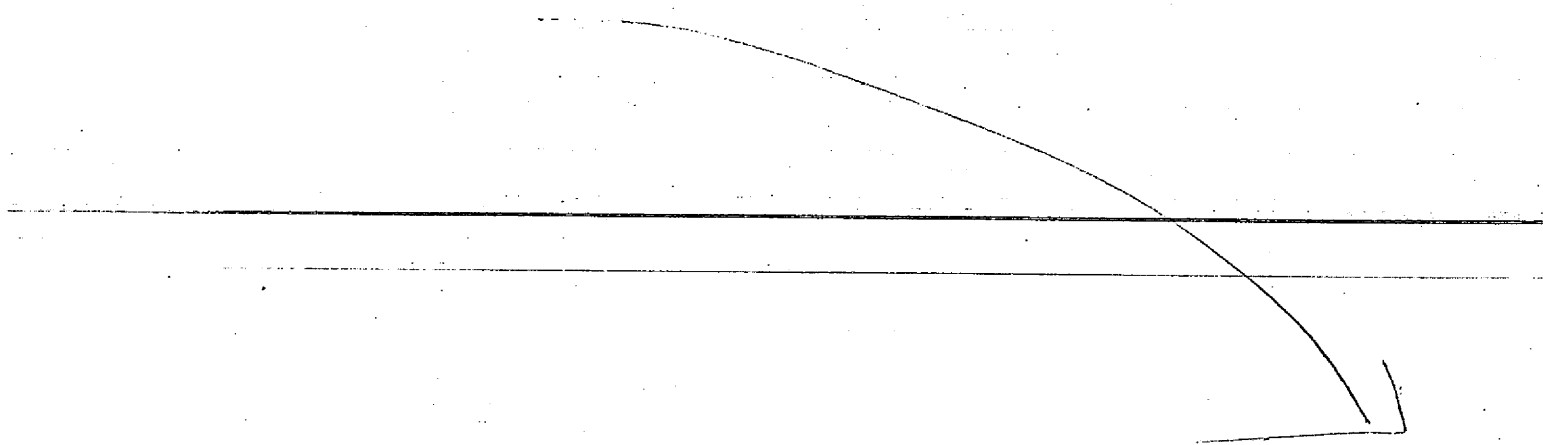
Under Lenin, the Third International was dedicated to the ideas the masses make history, and revolution is its locomotive. His successors attributed the survival and successes of Soviet Society to Stalin's genius, its shortcomings and setbacks to traitors serving foreign interests. The ideology of Mao, mutatis mutandis, also exhibits a spirit alien to historical materialism. In bourgeois American ideology history-making is a government monopoly in which the principal role is played by Presidents.

Ironically, however, the assassinations of Presidents in the United States are explained as eccentric intrusions into history. "The typical assassin of a President," reads a UPI dispatch from Washington, D.C., dated Nov. 2, 1969, "comes from a broken home, is a loner, unlucky with women, white, male, slightly built and of foreign origin. He acts in the name of a cause. He is not a member of an organized movement. This is the portrait of an assassin depicted today by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in its study of assassinations in the United States." The New York Times headlined this dispatch, "Presidential Assassin: A Composite Portrait."

Whether UPI epitomized the Commission's position accurately can be known when the full text of the report submitted by the commission to President Nixon is published; excerpts from it which appeared in the Times of Nov. 3, 1969 did not include any reference

to a "typical assassin of a President."

But gratuitous or not, UPI's composite portrait is a true offspring of the Commission's report. It may be that the scion outstripped its sire. Even so the genetic line is sure. UPI's "typical" Presidential assassin is an alienated individual; although "white," he is not really a masculine product of American society. The Commission believes "Consistent with its principles of freedom, the United States tolerates a fair amount of political tumult--not enough to inspire political assassination, but perhaps sufficient to provide the conditions under which the twisted mind of the assassin decides that an imagined evil must be set right through violence." It is comforting to note that judged by this criterion which applies aptly to Guiteau who was inspired by god and slew President Garfield, but not precisely to Booth, a Shakespearean matinee idol very successful with the opposite sex, who killed Lincoln in a theatre box, Lee Harvey Oswald who rejected the real evils of American capitalism, identified himself as a Marxist, counseled patience in work for a better social order, and spoke well of Kennedy on occasion, could not have been a Presidential assassin, either "typical" or otherwise.



What a comedy! A Presidential commission headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court premeditatedly assassinates the character of Lee Harvey Oswald and is requited by its younger sister in Executive service headed by President Eisenhower's elder brother! Doubtless, the irony was witless.

The Eisenhower panel foresaw assassinations in the future arising from "conditions associated with conspiratorial assassinations in other countries (which) appear to be developing in this country," but was stricken with myopic hindsight. Exigent political necessity which compelled President Johnson to attempt to dampen political and racial strife ~~following the assassination of President Kennedy~~ and to dispel doubts about the viability of the American "democratic" state, led him to innovate the ad hoc President's Commission On The Assassination of President Kennedy, of dubious Constitutional validity, as an agency of Executive policy. Its findings foreordained by political need and logic, were foretold by, among others, Robert Kennedy in dedicating a statue to his fallen brother in Berlin. Obediently, the Warren Commission denuded the assassination of political motivation and meaning and had no choice, in consequence, except to write an antibiography of the putative assassin as an alienated isolani shooting his way into infamy.

The Eisenhower panel could not impeach the Warren Commission without stimulating political strife with unforeseeable consequences, especially from the direction of the ["]military-industrial complex" in whose malignant bosom the Kennedy assassination was nurtured. Having projected future assassinations springing

from political tumult, it could not attribute past Presidential murders to political causes without making Kennedy's assassination an improbable and unacceptable exception. Enter on the stage of American history the antiheroic assassin as a non-American type, sui generis, a negative mirror image of the free-enterprise "good American;" and good copy for saleable journalism on the "senseless" perpetrators of "senseless" acts; and for learned papers in professional jargon the "presidential assassination syndrome."

"The evidence from American history," reads the excerpted report of the Eisenhower Commission, "is overwhelming: No Presidential assassination, with the exception of the abortive attempt on the life of President Truman, has been demonstrated to have sprung from a decision of an organized group whose goal was to change the policy or the structure of the United States Government. With that single exception, no United States Presidential assassination has ever been linked to such a group, either as a policy maker or as a member or hireling carrying out its directives." So! One is reminded of Ambrose Bierce's Devil's Dictionary definitions: "Positive, adj. Mistaken at the top of one's voice;" and "History, n. An account mostly false..."

It is safe to assume the Eisenhower commissioners ^{were} are aware John Wilkes Booth killed Lincoln. But one would never guess from their report "Booth had to be killed before he could talk. If Booth had friends in high places, and they were involved in

the plot, how could they deny their guilt for Lincoln's murder, if the assassin himself could be questioned?" (Historian Without An Armchair, Otto Eisenschiml, p.164). Eisenschiml shattered the official version of Lincoln's assassination more than thirty years before the Commission On the C^uases And P^revention o^f Vⁱolence, headed by a respected university president, extended it to other Presidential assassinations.

Who were Booth's "friends in high places" who instigated Lincoln's murder and condemned his assassin to death? "In February of 1866 President Andrew Johnson, under violent attack by the Radical Republicans since he had reverted to Lincoln's conciliatory policies toward the conquered South, included a large class of Northern politicians and high government figures in this indictment shouted during a speech from the White House steps: 'Are those who want to destroy our institutions and change the character of the government not satisfied with one martyr? Does not the blood of Lincoln appease the vengeance and wrath of the opponents of this Government? Have they not honor ^{and} _^ courage enough to effect the removal of the presidential obstacle otherwise than through the hands of the assassin?'" ~~Mask~~ (Mask For Treason, Vaughan Shelton, p.25). Shelton ^u _^ uncovered evidence to support Eisenschiml's thesis of a wider conspiracy than Booth's executioner group, involving government officials and Senators.

Both Eisenschiml and Shelton saw what was apparent to "George Washington Julian, a Radical Indiana Republican Congressman who ...sat in the inner council of the Radicals and kept a

diary...² in which he wrote on April 16, 1865³ "everything I see and hear today confirms me in the belief that Lincoln's removal in some way had become an absolute necessity" (Historian Without An Armchair, pp. 185-187). But although Eisen- schiml thought as late as 1962 Julian's ⁴sentience may well be the master clue to the true story of Lincoln's assassination" (ibid.), neither he nor Shelton attained insight into the underlying historical motivation ~~for~~ for the removal of that "Presidential obstacle" as the imperative need of the triumphant North to effect political domination of the defeated enemy in order to implant industrial capitalism in the South, create for the first time in the history of the ~~country~~ country a truly national economy, and open the road to unprecedented economic and social development. In fine, they were not Marxists.

What Eisenschiml and Shelton failed to do a Presidential commission cannot do. A Marxist approach is beyond the grasp and task of the Eisenhower Commission, like the Warren Commission before it, an agency of the capitalist state which both panels were created to serve. Such agencies cannot expose - they function to conceal - the class interests and political motivations of Presidential assassinations. The Warren Commission confessed itself unable to find a motive for Kennedy's murder and falsified that historic event. The Eisenhower Commission rewrote history. It is the task of Marxist scholarship to write the true history of Presidential assassinations.

Five years of attack on the Warren Commission Report by a discrete company of political opportunists, journalists, professional experts, academics, and morally outraged liberals

have not succeeded in unraveling the artificial mystery of the Kennedy assassination and tracing its consequences in American government policy, an urgent task for revolutionists whose immediate aim is exposure of the policy of the class enemy and whose ultimate aim is the conquest of power. When this is done Kennedy's assassination will be seen to have been, as was Lincoln's, the removal of a "presidential ^a obstacle." Lincoln's murder was an incident in the transition of the United States from a half-slave, half-mercantile-capitalist society to industrial capitalism. Kennedy's assassination, occurring at the peak of American imperialist power, was incidental to a struggle between historically dominant banking and related industrial interests on the one hand, and ~~x~~ historically newer interests (the "military-industrial complex"), chiefly in the South and Southwest, grown powerful in the Cold War against communism under preceding ~~democratic~~ Administrations, and threatened with constricting horizons by Kennedy policies ~~x~~ pivoting on accommodation with the communist world and ~~re~~ anti-imperialist forces in the "third world."

Under Johnson, American foreign policy moved to the right, accompanied by demagogic, bourgeois-liberal, domestic measures. Under Nixon, the center of gravity of total government policy is moving still further to the right. Hunger and reaction are increasing. The next upsurge of social dissent is threatened with violent, even bloody, suppression. The report of the

Eisenhower Commission On The Causes And Prevention Of Violence ~~has~~ provided ^s a political rationale for its application.

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 H. Jay
 12/2/69