

30 April 1965

The Editor
New Statesman
Great Turnstile
London W C 1

Dear Sir,

Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper's letter in the 19 March 1965 issue, commenting on Lord Devlin's approbation of the Warren Report, belatedly has come to my attention. As an American unable to accept or trust the Warren Report, I felt very heartened when Professor Trevor-Roper first expressed in print his own dissatisfaction with the conclusions of the Warren Commission.

I agree completely with Professor Trevor-Roper's statement that "a full examination should...include a study of the relation between the Report and the evidence—that is, the 26 volumes of Hearings and Exhibits—on which (the Report) is based." Other statements in his letter distress me, since I have devoted the last five months to this very examination and am now engaged in a second reading of the 26 volumes. Despite my unreserved agreement with Professor Trevor-Roper's basic position and my gratitude for his having made his views public, I must point out with sorrow that his letter contains inaccuracies.

Dr. Humes did not say that the x-rays taken during the autopsy were "withheld from him by the FBI," and it does not appear to me that he made any statement that is susceptible to that interpretation. Color and black-and-white photographs, as well as x-rays, were made during the post-mortem examination. The films in their cassettes were turned over to Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman, who was in attendance throughout the autopsy; he in turn delivered the photograph and x-ray films to his superior at the White House, Special-Agent-in-Charge Bouck. Here the trail is lost, presumably forever.

The essential thing is not that the Secret Service rather than the FBI took custody of photographs to which neither the autopsy surgeons nor the Warren Commission subsequently had access; it is, rather, that the photographs are indispensable in order to resolve crucial and flagrant conflicts and uncertainty as to the exact location of the wound in the President's back. Secret Service agent Glen Bennett, on whom the Warren Commission leans heavily for confirmation that there was a wound in the President's back despite the failure of the Parkland Hospital doctors to notice it, reported in notes written before the autopsy that he had seen a bullet strike the President in the back about four inches below the neck. Secret Service agent Clinton Hill, who was summoned to the autopsy theatre for the express purpose of witnessing the wounds, testified that the wound in the back was five inches below the neckline. Secret Service agents Kellerman and Greer described the wound in a manner which is not consistent with the location specified in the autopsy report, on which the whole theory elaborated by the Warren Commission with respect to the shots—number, trajectory, and source—depends. Most significant of all is that the holes made by the bullet in the back of the coat and shirt correspond with the description given by Bennett and Hill. The holes in the garments consequently demolish the Commission's bizarre hypothesis, unless it is possible to demonstrate by means of the autopsy photographs that the wound is actually higher than the clothing holes and eyewitness testimony suggests, and higher than the presumed exit wound at the Adam's apple.

It is not unreasonable to suspect that if the photographs provided such proof, they would have been secured by the Warren Commission, which had full power of subpoena, and included among the Exhibits. The transcripts of the testimony leave no doubt that the Commission was conscious of the conflicting evidence regarding that wound and could hardly have failed to realize the crucial nature of the autopsy photographs.

Quite apart from the location of the wound, the Commission's own data—properly interpreted—demonstrate the insupportability of its conclusion that one bullet produced all the wounds in the President and the Governor other than the head wound. Both the vertical and horizontal trajectories prove that the men were struck by different bullets. Surely it is obvious that a bullet that passed through the President's body from left to right, exiting at the center of the neck, would have pierced the left side of the Governor's back and could not conceivably have struck him, as it did, at the extreme right near the armpit. We cannot posit that the Governor had turned in his seat, for it would still have been impossible for his body to be so positioned in the path of the bullet as it emerged from the President's neck that it would strike him at the right armpit. The films taken during the assassination show that the Governor at no time assumed such a position. In any case, he testified that he did not turn until after he had heard the shot which supposedly struck him as well as the President. Even if all these objections are put aside, there remains the unalterable fact that the bullet that passed through the Governor's back and chest followed a sharper right-to-left trajectory by far than the bullet that passed through the President's neck.

There are many other fundamental defects in the case put forward by the Warren Commission. The comparison of the Report with the raw material in the Hearings and Exhibits appalled me, even though I began with serious doubts about the Commission's probity and competence. The raw material repeatedly exposes falsehoods, misrepresentations, and unfounded claims in the Report. These ruinous defects can scarcely be attributed to carelessness or haste, since on occasion the authors, avoiding direct use of falsehood, employ statements of literal fact to achieve the same results. It will suffice to mention one example: the Report cites a medical opinion rendered independently by three Parkland doctors, footnoting the citation to their testimony in March 1964. Two of the three doctors testified before the Warren Commission a second time, in April; one doctor then withdrew his first opinion categorically, after seeing evidence to which he had not been given access previously; the second doctor, while he did not formally retract his earlier opinion, qualified his views substantially.

The Report pretends that the April testimony, which is damaging if not devastating, to its case, does not exist, and buttresses its conclusions with medical opinion which was later retracted, and which the Warren Commission knew had been retracted. I find no reasonable alternative but to conclude that this represents an act of deliberate dishonesty.

It is not an isolated act. The full dismaying extent of the Warren Commission's duplicity cannot be measured without reading the 26 volumes from cover to cover. It is an experience almost as horrifying and shameful as the events that brought these works into being.

Yours sincerely,

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(I should be grateful if this letter is brought to the attention of Professor Trevor-Roper.)