

THE WARREN REPORT is dead and the real question is how it managed to live as long as it did. The answer, I think, lies in the great — and increasing — psychological importance of the American President as a kind of surrogate monarch. The partisan leader of a single party, he is also the President of all the people. During his term he looms larger than life, while his death in office is a national trauma. It's important for us to believe not just in the President but in his *office*. It's one thing to dislike or hate or joke about a president — quite another to kill him. We know that plots occur throughout our national life. Business firms conspire to violate anti-trust laws. Corrupt union-leaders plot murder. The Mafia, a well-publicized institution, plots quite routinely at crime. But one does not plot against the *office* of the President of the United States of America. And so the murder of Kennedy in Dallas on November 22nd 1963, was more than a conscious shock to the nation — it was a blow to the single visible symbol of our unity.

Many aspects of the Dallas affair pointed to a plot. Powerful interests stood to gain from Kennedy's death: Southern racists, Texas oilmen, the Pentagon. Even the Vice-President. Normally we might have enjoyed the idea of a plot — conspiracy theories are apt to be popular. But not in the case of the President. That he could be gunned down was unthinkable. Unfortunately it had happened. But at least we could insist he had been gunned down by one man. We wanted a simple, open-and-shut, crack-pot murder. And that is what the Warren Commission gave us. A horrible, blinding tragedy, but a tragedy that originated with only one assassin — Lee Harvey Oswald.

Three years have passed since Kennedy was murdered, and more than two since the Warren Report was issued. The numbness after Dallas has passed. Questions are now being asked that should have been asked much earlier. But those who asked the questions too soon were either simply not



heard, or were dismissed as warped, eccentric trouble-makers. For example, immediately after the Warren Report came out, *Liberation* (an independent pacifist monthly) ran two long articles by Vincent J. Salandria, a Philadelphia lawyer, showing the Commission's findings to be doubtful at some points and inaccurate at others. Salandria was ignored. Then in October of last year *The Unanswered Questions About President Kennedy's Assassination* was published. Its author was Sylvan Fox, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who was then the city editor of the *New York World Telegram*. It came with a special introduction by Edwyn Silberling, who had held a key post in the Justice Department under Robert Kennedy. But though it was a devastating critique of the Warren Report, it went almost unnoticed.

It wasn't till early this summer, with the publication of Edward Jay Epstein's *Inquest*, that the public finally began a serious examination of the Report. *Inquest* — 224 pages of careful academic prose — was sufficiently understated to make it intellectually respectable. It was graced with a special introduction by Richard Rovere, who writes regular and thoughtful reports on Washington, D.C. for the *New Yorker*. Then came Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* (with an introduction by the distinguished British scholar H. R. Trevor-Roper) and Richard Popkin's *The Second Oswald* (with an introduction by Murray Kempton, a col-

umnist for the *New York Post* and a man of acknowledged integrity).

The flood gates were open. Articles popped up everywhere. News-magazines took note of the new books, and at first there was a concerted effort to answer the attacks on the Warren Commission. By this time, though, there were too many technical holes in the Report. It's impossible to explain in a paragraph or two why, scientifically, the same bullet could not have hit both Kennedy and Governor Connolly. But it has also proven impossible for defenders of the Warren Commission to explain just how certain key conclusions of the Report can possibly be accepted, except by faith. From the timing of a amateur movie of the assassination, from the time required between shots in firing the rifle (if the facts are exactly as the Report describes them), it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Oswald was not the only man firing at Kennedy that day. And if he was, in fact, alone, then certain key passages in the Warren Report are wrong. As one critic commented, it's not that the Report relies too heavily on coincidence, but that it flies so directly in the face of certain facts that belief is not merely difficult but utterly impossible. Or *can* a bullet which is fired from above strike a man in the back just below his collar and then exit *upward* through his throat, swing around in flight to strike Governor Connolly in the chest, plough on through his wrist and thigh and come to rest, virtually unmarked, on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital?

The evidence against the Warren Report is now so convincing that *The Times* of London has called for a new investigation. Loudon Wainwright, who contributes a weekly page to *Life*, devoted his full space to comments on the Epstein and Popkin books and closed with a call for a new investigation. I picked up the August issue of *Philadelphia* — an ad-thick local magazine aimed at the conservative business community — and was astounded to find a carefully documented 16-page article attacking the Warren Report. Finally, the October issue of

*Commentary*, a responsible Jewish journal of the "liberal establishment", published a sober, 9-page attack rebutting critics of the Report but concluding: "It is no longer possible, however, simply to love the Warren Commission for the enemies it has made. We know now that the Commission did not satisfactorily investigate the assassination. It did not fit the established facts into a narrative consistent with all of them." The author called for a new investigation to set the public mind at rest. In other words, even the defenders of the Warren Commission have been forced to urge a re-examination of the events of November 22nd 1963.

There's something else in the air — nasty references to Johnson as Macbeth. There has been quite a flap about a play called *Macbird*, a satire on Macbeth and written in the style of Shakespeare. The play cannot find a publisher or a producer and has been printed and circulated privately — but debate about it is public. *Macbird* casts Johnson as Macbeth and Kennedy as Banquo. I've heard, too, of a new button with the slogan "Macbeth Lives — In The White House". These are ugly rumours, and they may help to account for Johnson's continuing slide in the opinion polls. (The polls, incidentally, show that 46 per cent of the American public now believes Oswald did not act alone.) The problem for Johnson is that any new investigation will reflect disastrously on the competence and/or integrity of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, on the former head of the C.I.A., and on leaders in the House and Senate.

ON THE OTHER hand, it's unlikely that doubts about the Report will fade away. The events of that tragic November day are once more on everyone's mind. Until and unless a lot of questions can be answered it's certain the rumours will get nastier. One possible political bombshell could be a public request by Senator Robert Kennedy for a new investigation. The longer such an investigation is delayed, the more harmful it will be, for the political fabric of the nation is already stained by doubts. A full investigation would, in the long run, do less harm than continued official silence.