

Belin asks too much

Austin

The Pentagon Papers released by Daniel Ellsberg have opened the credibility gap of the Johnson Administration as wide as the Gulf of Tonkin. It took Americans most of the Sixties to comprehend the scope of our crimes in Southeast Asia. For most of those years the charges from the Left — that Johnson and the Pentagon were lying to the public, that civilians were being casually murdered in Vietnam, that we were laying to waste an entire country — were considered the paranoid and irresponsible ravings of the radical fringe.

America is no longer as naive as it was a decade ago. Perhaps this country is finally ready to look honestly at the crimes of the Sixties, to understand them and learn from them.

It wasn't just on the subject of Vietnam that we were deceived. The Sixties saw the violent deaths of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers and other political leaders. It was reassuring in the three most infamous of these murders to attribute the crimes to solitary assassins, dangerous madmen, but, still, men who acted alone to achieve their treacherous ends.

IF THE WARREN Commission report was more than a little contradictory, so what? It was better for the country to forget about the tragic death of a popular young president, than to open the sores a thorough investigation of the assassination might reveal.

Then came the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy by two more "lone assassins." Again the American public preferred to accept the official, if specious, versions of the assassinations rather than demand full investigations of the deaths. James Earl Ray was whisked off to prison over his own protestations that he had been part of a conspiracy and still the public was too lazy or too scared to call for more information.

Perhaps now that we have faced up to the full implications of our activities in Southeast Asia, we can also summon the courage to look into these grave domestic crimes.

Since 1968, a small and poorly-financed group calling itself the Committee to Investigate Assassinations has been studying the deaths of the Kennedys and the Reverend King. To start with, they are computerizing all of the information that various Warren Commission critics have compiled on the Dallas assassination. The committee is reported to have sufficient information in its files to completely discredit the Warren report. It also has found some startling new information on the murders of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King (see "The Irregulars

Reflections

Take the Field" by Fred J. Cook in the July 19 *Nation*).

In this issue, the *Observer* has printed an article by Sylvia Meagher which casts serious doubts on the credibility of the testimony of one of the commission's key witnesses, Charles Givens, and on the methods by which this testimony was taken. Ms. Meagher's article speaks for itself. For the most part it is simply an accurate compilation of Warren Commission records.

DAVID BELIN'S reply to Ms. Meagher's piece does not seem to me to be equally straightforward. It is an important document, however, simply because a key member of the Warren Commission team has finally chosen to respond to one of the critics. And it is important because for the first time Belin affirms that Charles Givens gave contradictory statements to investigators. The Warren Commission report never mentions the fact that Givens told different stories at different times. It only reveals what Givens told David Belin, months after the assassination.

Mr. Belin went to a great deal of trouble to prepare a response for the *Observer*. We learn his views on assassination critics as a whole ("sensationalists," he calls them), his views on the Vietnam War (we've all been deceived) and his earnest defense of the investigative techniques used by the Warren Commission. But nowhere in his lengthy response does Mr. Belin apply himself to the specific charges in Ms. Meagher's article. We simply are asked to take David Belin's word that the statement Charles Givens made to him on April 8, 1964, five months after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, is the true account of what Givens saw on Nov. 22, 1963. We're given no logical explanation of why we should believe Givens' statement of April 8 rather than his statements made on the very day of the assassination and on Dec. 2 and on March 18.

Charles Givens was either lying on Nov. 22, Dec. 2 and March 18, or he was lying on April 8 or he was lying on all those occasions. If I were on a jury listening to Givens' various tales, I would probably choose to believe the story he told on the day of the assassination rather than the story he told five months later. At the very least, the Warren Commission report should have noted that Givens gave more than one account of what he saw.

Mr. Belin's article is the slick, irrelevant reply of a lawyer who doesn't have much of a defense to present.

The curious testimony of Charles Givens is a small and not very sensational footnote to the story of the Kennedy assassination. It will make a few more index cards for the computers of the Committee to investigate assassinations.

There's a great deal more work to be done to find out what actually happened on Nov. 22, 1963, and on those other infamous assassination days. It's not a very pleasant task. But this country has little chance of regaining its integrity until the real stories are brought into the open.

K.N.

Communication

By Don Gardner

Shepherd

The article written by Michael Eakin (*Obs.*, July 16) concerning the role of MayDay Tribes is the most inaccurate, naive and misleading piece on a major political situation I've ever read in *The Texas Observer*. And my piece isn't meant to be one of those ludicrous "refute" things in which people argue in print. The event which took place in Washington, D.C., April 25-May 5 has indeed been poorly reported, as Eakin stated. However, his article in one of our few honest journals was the final motivating force which unleashes my silence to say: MayDay was a violent action manipulated by a few in hopes that a Chicago-type reaction would follow, further throwing the country into chaos.

After making such a high-and-mighty statement I'm going to turn and start elsewhere to back up my analysis. When I left Houston for Washington I was thoroughly enthusiastic about the militant non-violent Gandhian style tactics which were being advertised. A group of journalists, including myself, planned to put out a daily paper during the action. It gave me a good opportunity to view the whole action from near the inside and, at the same time, as a participant.

THE WHOLE ACTION was organized by the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice. MayDay and the MayDay Tribe are political arms of this newly created political organization. PCPJ has a coordinating committee made up of such people as Rennie Davis and Sid Peck who are in control of the decision making. PCPJ initiated and publicized the MayDay actions and when people arrived in Washington they were told all decisions were up to them and their regions. PCPJ sent out the call for people to participate

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