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LINK WITH LANE?

Another Story of Warren Critique

By A. C. GREENE

AS MUCH AS ANY ONE THING, the renewal of interest in and criticism of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President Kennedy was started by a book—"Inquest" by a Cornell graduate student, Edward J. Epstein.

Within two months of its publication came Mark Lane's "Rush to Judgment" and a half dozen or so more books critical of the commission, and now there is no need to remind you to what proportions that criticism has grown.

But a San Francisco Chronicle reporter says there is another story behind the story of "Inquest."

The Reviews Were Favorable

When "Inquest" appeared in June, practically everybody reviewed it favorably (including The Times Herald) and some reviewers were lavish. Most of them were impressed by the dispassionate, detached calmness of the book which, said Epstein, he had begun as a master's thesis (at the suggestion of Professor Andrew Hacker), not about the Warren Commission but "on the problem of how a government organization functions in an extraordinary situation without rules or precedents." Richard Goodwin, the former Kennedy aide, reviewing the book in Book Week (a supplement used by four major metropolitan papers) wrote that "throughout his research he (Epstein) was not trying to prove a case of his own nor trying to support a theory nor attempting to discredit the Commission."



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But Joel Pimsleur, of the San Francisco Chronicle, questions all this and in an article called "The Story Behind 'Inquest' and 'Rush'" says there was a third man involved in the book besides Epstein and Hacker. None other than Mark Lane. It began in the fall of 1964, says Pimsleur, when Lane, Epstein and Hacker met at Dr. Hacker's home in Ithaca.

Lane faced several problems: his actions before the Commission had estranged him completely from that group, his public image was battered from his inflammatory speeches and association with Marguerite Oswald in defending Lee Harvey Oswald, and criticism of the Warren Commission report was not publicly "acceptable." He had to have someone break trail with both the Commission and the public.

"Lane saw Epstein as his pipeline to the Commission," wrote Pimsleur. "The two men met in New York where for days they did preliminary spadework together—with Lane priming Epstein on what to look for, whom, how and what to ask. How did it work? The same Commission counsel who refused to give his working papers to Lane gave them to Epstein. Epstein, according to Dr. Hacker, was also 'sharing information' with Lane—until he got hold of a previously unreleased FBI report and told Lane he had decided to do his own book." (Pimsleur also quotes Lane as saying privately, "Ed was out to get the Commission.")

'Inquest' Paved the Way

How well the Epstein caper, we might call it, succeeded comes clear, the article says, from the next chapter in events. "Before 'Inquest' Lane's book, 'Rush to Judgment,' had been turned down by 15 publishers."

Lane's first publisher, Grove Press, had backed out even after Lane offered to guarantee sale of enough books to break even. "Inquest" sold well but not sensationally, but its importance was in opening the door. "Criticism of the commission had (through it) achieved respectability," writes Pimsleur.

"Holt, Rinehart & Winston, one of the biggest publishing houses in the nation—a firm that Lane had not even bothered to contact because he believed it was too conservative (Holt at that time was partially owned by Dallas' Clint Murchison; it is also J. Edgar Hoover's publisher)—now approached Lane.

The rest is history: Epstein's book sold about 20,000 copies before going into paperback. Lane's sold 30,000 in the first two weeks and has now sold over 113,000 copies, rushed through 10 printings and is still a runaway best-seller."

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This story may not necessarily diminish the validity of the criticism of either "Inquest" or "Rush to Judgment" for many readers, but, as Pimsleur points out, "One wonders if the reviewers would have been so easily persuaded, or so charitable had they known more of the background of the book." Pimsleur says the article has drawn no repercussions or denials, although so far as is known it is the first to present this side of "Inquest."
