

# DEAR EDITOR

## WARREN REPORT

May I express my appreciation for what today must be described as your courage in printing the three very worthwhile articles on the Warren Commission Report by Leo Sauvage (NL, November 22, December 20, January 3).

Almost unique among the limited writings about the Warren Commission, his pieces have been devoid of factual error, a failing that has characterized almost everything else I have seen. Like Sauvage, I have written a book on the Report. Like his, mine is also unpublished (in the United States).  
Hyattstown, Md. HAROLD WEISBERG

Leo Sauvage has made it devastatingly clear in his three articles that the Warren Report is neither competent nor trustworthy. It is therefore dismaying that two of your readers took issue with him, one in tone of almost personal offense, without confronting Sauvage's explicit criticisms. John P. Tompkins ("Dear Editor," NL, December 20) raised the philosophical and almost irrelevant objection that the Warren Report must be accepted because Robert Kennedy accepts it. He overlooks the fact that William Manchester has been retained by the Kennedys to write "an authoritative history of the assassination," and that Manchester seems to take a dim view of the Warren Report, judging from his remarks to the *New York Times* (May 9, 1965, page 43). In any case, the concurrence of the hereabove in the official findings (which Robert Kennedy said he had not read and did not intend to read) can hardly substitute for an independent critical examination of the evidence.

J. C. Rich ("Dear Editor," NL, January 3) has confidence in the members of the Warren Commission and considers Oswald a "hopeless jerk" and a "malicious screwball." Again, such subjective personal loyalties and antipathies cannot substitute for a painstaking study of the testimony and documents, nor can such arbitrary interpretations of character and motive refute a single one of Sauvage's points.

Perhaps someday one of these angry uninformed partisans of the Warren Report, or—miracle of miracles—the Commission's stoic and silent lawyers will be good enough to confront specific questions specifically and forego the philosophical and psychological generalizations in which they tend to indulge. Meanwhile, the questions raised by Sauvage and other responsible critics of the Warren Report remain without an answer. Have the authors of the Report taken a vow of silence?  
New York City SYLVIA MEAGHER

Having turned away from the barn door target of the Warren Commission and directed his fire against those who also criticize the Report but accept its conclusions, Leo Sauvage cannot avoid treating the conclusions implicit in his own critique. Though he protests that he cannot be expected to reach a

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standard of truth unattained by a government commission, it does behoove him to reach a level of truth unattained by the critics he impugns. As it stands, the case that Oswald acted alone and even the case that he was one of two assassins both seem stronger than Sauvage's case that he was framed.

After reading "The Case Against Mr. X" (NL, January 3), I still find Dwight Macdonald's question pertinent: Who else could have done it? For if Oswald was indeed framed as Sauvage's article indicates, it follows that he was innocent; and, if he was indeed innocent, what was he doing with all the guns and psychoses, what was he doing on the sixth floor, and why did he flee desperately across the city? If he was one of two assassins, though, as implied in Sauvage's first article ("The Warren Commission's Case Against Oswald," NL, November 22), why was it necessary to frame him? Sauvage's queries cumulatively succeed in casting doubt on the Commission Report; but the whole of his argument, diminished by internal inconsistency, is much less than the sum of its parts.

Even his attack on the Commission seems somewhat excessive. Oswald's death at the hand of Jack Ruby was the most compelling evidence of a conspiracy. Thus it was reasonable for the Commission to concentrate on this possibility. And the Commission's failure to connect Ruby to Oswald, Tippit, or any other likely conspirators, provides reasonable corroboration for the conclusion that Oswald acted alone. Sauvage's fragmentary speculations are the most intriguing yet produced for a conspiracy theory. But they are speculations and can be answered by contrary speculations. The significance of the clipboard might have escaped the FBI, or having discovered so much other evidence, the investigators might have suspended the search. The cartridges could have been thrown away or hidden almost anywhere and evaded the apparently bat-eyed investigation. The Irving gunsmith might have written the "Oswald" receipt to attract attention and then become alarmed by the importance attached to it, and backed away. The man at the Ford dealer's and the man at the rifle range may have been similarly frightened by their brush with such portentous history. In general, I think it is a mistake to underestimate the number of private fantasies that could be evoked by so telepathic an event as the assassination of a young President.

I would propose that Leo Sauvage investigate the case further, on the spot, and attempt to reconstruct the Tippit murder, for which there seems to be a number of witnesses and about which there remains a host of questions. If Sauvage can incriminate Tippit or substantively, through witnesses, impeach the theory that Oswald killed him, he will warrant the most serious hearing; and if he can implicate Ruby, who is still alive and under litigation, in a conspiracy, he is as

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# DEAR EDITOR

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sured of a place in the nation's every newspaper, in the office of the President of the nation's every publishing house, and in history. As it is, Sauvage certainly deserves the attention of those Penguins on the Warren Commission. But his speculations remain inconclusive, and their implication that Oswald was framed raises more intractable problems of reconstruction than the Warren Report itself, which though staggered by Sauvage is still on its feet.

Los Angeles      **RICHARD G. WATSON**

I claim no authority as a close student of the Warren Report. However, on the basis of the evidence he presents, Léo Sauvage discredits his own conclusion that a probable conspiracy underlay the Kennedy assassination. The conspirators, according to Sauvage, used an individual resembling Oswald to fire a rifle conspicuously at a rifle range and to attempt to buy an automobile in the name of Oswald. Someone not resembling Oswald attempted a false lead by arranging to have a telescopic sight put on a gun like Oswald's. The conspirators then got hold of Oswald's rifle, shot at Kennedy with it, vanished unseen, and several days later planted a clipboard in the sixth floor room further to implicate Oswald.

The room containing the fired rifle was only fortuitously empty at the time of the assassination. Two workers were in fact there only shortly before and might have remained. Even Oswald could not have been sure that he could use the room although, if his mind had been in a disordered state, he might have overlooked this difficulty. That conspirators who could plan and long in advance operated this enormous conspiracy would overlook this factor is not at all credible. Moreover, if they had planned long in advance, would not the clipboard have been planted in advance also? Would they dare plant it later? Surely they could not depend upon the blindness of both the Dallas police and the FBI. And, if they could not, planting the clipboard later would likely serve to cast doubt on Oswald's guilt rather than further implicate him. This consideration is so compelling that one cannot believe the clipboard was planted by a set of conspirators—as opposed perhaps to a sub-par watchman playing games—unless both the police and the FBI were involved massively in the conspiracy. Yet even Sauvage dismisses this alternative from consideration. Large conspiracies cannot be kept secret indefinitely.

Sauvage lays stress on the attempt to impersonate Oswald. Yet he believes Ryder because this "Oswald" looked different according to his testimony. Why did not the conspirators continue the impersonation? And was this not very dangerous also, for if the lens were different from that on Oswald's rifle, the conspiracy would again face revelation. Yet at no point apparently did Ryder state that a particular lens was specified, surely a *sine qua non* for this kind of plot.

Was the killing of Tippit part of the con-

spiracy? Then how could the conspirators know that Oswald would go to the movies after first going to his apartment? How could they know he would carry a gun? And, if it was pure coincidence that Tippit was killed by a revolver of the same caliber as Oswald's at that time and along the route, isn't it carrying coincidence too far that Oswald's revolver was fired? What did he do: shoot it in the air for fun as he ran along the street? And wouldn't someone have noticed this?

As for Oswald's expertise with the rifle, this has long been beside the point. A man preparing to assassinate the President is not in a normal state of mind; nor is his physiological system operating according to normal standards. In some reasonable percentage of cases he will either freeze and become ineffective or act far superior to his normal level of performance. It was Kennedy's bad luck that the latter proved to be the case.

Finally, such elaborate plots occur in James Bond movies and bad detective stories. Such elaborate plots are worthless for conspiracies that must be kept secret indefinitely. If one assumes that the primary purpose of the "conspirators" was to kill the President rather than to implicate Oswald, they would hardly have run the additional large risks incurred by these deceptions. Indeed, regardless of their purpose, they would surely desire to avoid such overelaborate plots. And if there was no conspiracy, there is no reasonable alternative to Oswald's guilt.

Chicago, Ill.

**MORTON A. KAPLAN**  
Chairman, Committee on  
International Relations  
University of Chicago

*Leo Sauvage replies:*

I have nothing to add to Mrs. Sylvia Meagher's clear and straightforward statement, which disposes of the letters of John P. Tompkins and J. C. Rich. I would only like to comment on one word: The fact that Robert Kennedy accepts the Warren Report is not "almost" but *totally* irrelevant, and would be so even if the former Attorney General had not admitted—or boasted—that he did not read it. Indeed, it is startling for me to discover that there is still room here in the U.S. for the medieval contention that a point of view should be accepted because of the authority or the prestige of the source which expresses it. James Wechsler for example, has lectured foreign correspondents for failing to base their interpretation of the facts, as he did, on the personality of Earl Warren. "European journalists," he wrote, "have a special responsibility to tell their readers the nature of the man who conducted this inquiry, and whose name gives so much weight and meaning to its findings." My own conception of journalistic responsibilities—and ethics—is to examine everything honestly and carefully, and if anything appears erroneous, incoherent or otherwise unconvincing, to say so, whatever the source.

It is not much easier for me to accept—or,

for that matter, understand—the logic in the letters of Richard G. Watson and Professor Kaplan.

I have criticized the Warren Report and given samples of the prejudices, inconsistencies, omissions and downright distortions which have led me to reject its conclusions. Watson and Kaplan do not take up any of those points. They prefer to counterattack. Let's admit that "a sub-par watchman playing games" introduced Oswald's clipboard into the sixth floor storage room. Why didn't the Commission try to locate the watchman? The fact is that the Warren Commission not only did not investigate the mysterious presence of the clipboard but pretends to use it as "additional testimony" against Oswald. And if, as Watson suggests, the missing cartridges were thrown away or "evaded the apparently bar-eyed investigation," what about the Commission's failure to prove, in the first place, that Oswald had bought any ammunition at all for his rifle?

The real point, of course, which even as distinguished a person as Professor Kaplan appears willing to ignore, is that my being wrong in each and every one of my deductions still would not give substance to any of the Commission's unsubstantiated accusations. It still would not make a brown shirt a white shirt, Helen Markham a reliable witness, or Lee Oswald a better marksman than a master of the National Rifle Association. What right has the Warren Commission to declare that Oswald killed the President when it is unable to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Oswald was the man at the window (I surely would like to know Kaplan's opinion on the validity of Howard L. Brennan's "identification"), and when it is obliged to admit that there is only a "probability"—and that there has been "some difference of opinion"—as to the affirmation that the "nearly whole bullet" found on Governor Connally's stretcher was one of the bullets which hit President Kennedy? These, I believe, are the things that matter. After all, I didn't call anybody an assassin, the Commission did.

It is true that according to Kaplan, Oswald's expertise with a rifle, for example, "has long been beside the point": He hit his target because "a man preparing to assassinate the President is not in a normal state of mind." I suppose Kaplan is not troubled by being told that in the case of General Walker, Oswald missed his target, since in that case Oswald's state of mind may, for a change, have made him "freeze and become ineffective." It would be useless also, I think, to mention the fact that Oswald, whom a deranged "physiological system" transformed into a crack shot, was never deranged enough to express any animosity, or even to show the slightest nervousness, when the name of the President was pronounced before him. May I at least remind the Professor that, according to the Warren Report, Oswald hit his target not because he was crazy but because it was easy.

As to specific questions, I do not know

where Watson has seen that I implied Oswald was one of two assassins. What I did and do imply is that Oswald was innocent, the Commission having utterly failed to convince me that he was guilty. What was he doing on the sixth floor? Working. Dr. Watson, or pretending to work as workers sometimes do at 11:55 A.M. (the time Oswald was last seen there): Why did he flee desperately across the city? Because a policeman had just threatened him with a gun, and because he had just learned that the President had been shot, and because he felt—this time, as it turned out, for good reason—that society would again be after him. An assassin, coldblooded enough to rush to the second floor lunchroom in order to secure an alibi, would stay and mingle with the crowd. Able to leave the building without being stopped, he would run off to the Mexican border, not to the Texas Theater. As to what he was doing "with all the guns and psychoses," what are the many thousands other people doing who are known to have guns and psychoses, but are not accused of killing Presidents?

Professor Kaplan has more questions. I do not know the reason for Tippit's murder, but neither does the Commission. Why did Ryder's "Oswald" look different? First of all, Ryder did not remember anything about the man. The hunting season was just starting, there was plenty of work, and Ryder, for that reason, did not remember anything about the telescopic sight either. Why should a "particular lens" be specified? And why should the possibility that Ryder's client was not the same as the automobile dealer's disturb me? Maybe the "impersonator" was in bed with the fit, and in any case the name on the repair tag sufficed to do the job. But is Kaplan really serious in asking me that type of question, instead of asking the Warren Commission to explain its attitude in the case? Am I to understand that Professor Kaplan approves of the Commission deliberately limiting its investigation to one possibility (the very unlikely one that Ryder's customer was the real Oswald with a different gun), and insinuating

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that Ryder fabricated a false repair tag without starting any proceedings against him in order to prove it?

One last point. Kaplan assumes that "the primary purpose of the 'conspirators' was to kill the President rather than to implicate Oswald." In the only one of the 24 chapters of my book where I do any assuming, I assume something quite different. If the "conspirators" were southern racists, they simply could not afford to have the President assassinated without having an assassin ready for the public. There is not the slightest doubt that if there had not been an Oswald in Dallas, or even if no suspect at all had been found, an overwhelming majority of the American people (not to speak of the rest of the world) would have been convinced of a racist plot, and all the Klans and similar organizations would have had a very difficult time. Which means that having President Kennedy assassinated could make sense for them only if they first made sure that someone who had nothing in common with them would be arrested and convicted.

As to Watson's suggestion that I go and attempt to do what the Warren Commission, without noticeable protest from Watson and Kaplan, refrained from doing, no, thank you. I am no detective and do not intend to become one. Though reader John P. Tompkins, whose profession I don't know, suggested that I have made a "career" out of criticizing the Warren Commission, I have quite a number of other interests in life. I simply don't like being hoodwinked, and when I read the Warren Report, that "unfortunately, was the impression I got.

### VIETNAM EXCHANGE

Ronald Steel's article contains so many illusions that it is no wonder that Roche's usual brilliance is insufficient in responding ("The Vietnam War—An Exchange," NL, January 3). To cite just a few examples:

1. Holding back the tide of Communism in South Vietnam may not be a sufficient condition for defending democracy there, but it is surely a necessary condition, and also elsewhere. There is nothing in Steel's article which reflects an awareness of this fact.

2. That the Vietcong is not a puppet of Hanoi, that Hanoi is not a puppet of Peking, does not change the fact that all three of them (and the other Communist countries) form an alliance to spread Communism throughout the world, primarily by wars of liberation. Their differences no more prevent them from seeking this goal than did the differences between Tojo, Mussolini and Hitler prevent the latter from seeking a similar goal.

3. That we get along with Communist countries in Eastern Europe does not mean that we should not prevent South Vietnam (or other countries) from being taken over by the Communists. It means that once a country

has been taken over, we do the best we can short of liberation by military force which is likely to lead to a nuclear war. But preventing a Communist takeover by limited war, can contribute to containing Communism without running the risk of a nuclear war.

4. Steel contradicts himself in suggesting that our government treats Communism monolithically while admitting that we act differently toward different Communist countries. Furthermore, he is inconsistent with his own suggestion that we treat them differently (which we do) by implying that we should act toward the Vietcong in the same way we do toward Eastern Europe. Who is guilty of looking at Communists in a monolithic fashion?

Buffalo, N.Y.

MARVIN ZIMMERMAN  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
State University of New York

While leaving most of the criticism of Ronald Steel-type arguments on Vietnam and Communism to those articles you—and I—hope will be forthcoming, it might at least be suggested here that if you truly wish to "help clarify the issues involved in the emotional arguments over Vietnam," as you say, then publishing such highly emotional pieces as "Our Asian Illusions" seems hardly the best way to do so. Granting that this issue warrants the integrity of interest and concern shown by Steel, it is necessary that at least a few journals in this country try to remain above the hysteria that so easily results from the gravity of the problem. Steel's article, the style of which is often reminiscent of a Berkeley Teach-In (and not generally characteristic of Steel's own writing, if I recall correctly), draws forth this comment primarily because it has been published in one of the few journals in this country where so much better is expected.

Not that some of Steel's points are not well taken. Certainly the Administration is often less than candid with the public; certainly we are not "defending democracy" now in Vietnam; and of course there are diversities in the Communist world today—though not necessarily as Steel presents them. But surely few readers of this journal are deceived on these points—and if they are, they could be enlightened by many who are not so weighted down by their own illusions as Steel.

For instance, the only alternative to a non-existent democracy in South Vietnam—besides authoritarian Socialism or Communism—is not Fascist dictatorship, as is suggested in several places. For one who sees so many shades in the Communist world, Steel is surely black and white when it comes to potential governments in South Vietnam. There are perhaps more forms of government possible there including, in the long term, some with significant democratic characteristics—if the South Vietnamese are given a little time in which to work one out. In helping them to