

March 1967

DIVERSION IN NEW ORLEANS

Like an active volcano, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy continues to spurt political lava. Latest manifestations are the sensational allegations made by New Orleans District Attorney Garrison. A stream of revelations about a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, leaked, ferreted out, and announced officially, and contentious comment thereon by government officials and private citizens, all bruited by the irresponsible mass-communication media, evoke memories of the performance in 1963 by the Dallas police and District Attorney Wade. Again, a case relating to the assassination is being tried in the press and on radio and television. American "justice" does not change its spots. Once more, as in the past, it serves as handmaiden to political interests. Who does not understand this simple fact cannot hope to penetrate the assassination to its source. According to current reports Garrison's investigation was begun in secret in October 1966, when the irrepressible tide of criticism of the government's account of the triple mur-

der in Dallas had virtually demolished the Warren Commission Report. It was projected into public consciousness explosively by the press in the middle of February 1967, hard on the heels of the last of four installments of William Manchester's Death Of A President in Look magazine. As of this writing, Garrison's investigation has resulted in public allegations of crime, sensation, speculation, political conflict, and one arrest, but no formal legal charges and no evidence. Specific charges and evidence to support them may be forthcoming at a formal legal hearing in New Orleans now scheduled for March 14. He who thinks only in terms of "evidence" must suspend thought and wait on the calendar, hoping, despite the lesson of the Warren Commission, some definitive and conclusive truth will be forthcoming on March 14 or at a later date should the hearing be postponed.

But for the political minded, Garrison's investigation is already significantly rich. On three counts it is a defeat for the Johnson policy with respect to the assassination of President Kennedy: 1) regardless of its other merits and

defects, it makes impossible the realization of Johnson's original aim of dispelling doubt and suspicion, ending rumor, and quieting public fears; 2) it projects a conspiracy against the finding of the Warren Commission a single assassin killed Kennedy; and 3) it alleges a political motive for the assassination whereas the Johnson policy pivots on a non-political murder.

Motive for Garrison's investigation is as yet obscure. Assurances of his personal integrity are irrelevant. More to the point are his public statements and those emanating from his office. The projection of a conspiracy by antiCommunists, including Marxist Oswald as a participant but not as a gunman, to kill Castro, which became a plot to kill Kennedy is an absurdity equal to the Warren Commission nonsense Oswald tried to kill General E.A. Walker because he thought him a fascist and failing in that attempt slew Kennedy whom he liked. Garrison's statements he had "solved" the assassination, those involved and who had guilty knowledge could not escape except by death, and arrests were months away, lend themselves to the interpretation he was pressuring or threat-

ening unnamed parties and simultaneously was reassuring them they had time to come to terms with him.

There is some reason to think an accomodation may have been made by Garrison and forces oppesing his investigation:

1) the investigation led to conflict with the Federal government which tried to discount the investigation in advance of its results and, contradictorily, to shortcircuit it by requesting exclusive possession of the evidence developed by it; 2) attribution of the conspiracy to anti-Communist Cuban exiles implicated the CIA; 3) development in this direction was auspicious in view of disclosure of subversion by the CIA of student organizations, faculty scholars, research bodies, publications and publishing houses, and unions, but was aborted as the establishment rallied to meet the threat with exculpatory defense by Senator Robert Kennedy, a Presidential whitewash commission, and declarations by the holders of power in Congress they would not permit an investigation of the CIA by the legislature; 4) later attribution of the conspiracy to a Com-

munist source - Castro; 50 then silence about the political source of the plot.

An antiCommunist conspiracy might have been linked to the Klan plot to kill Kennedy reported by the UPI and, more intelligently, by the Midlothian Mirror, about which nothing more has been heard since early February. Conversion of the conspiracy from an antiCommunist to a Communist plot, comprising the same individuals in both instances, signifies Garrison's investigation, the fourth "official" one since the assassination, will no more yield the true source of the assassination than has its forerunners. A lone parish district attorney in Louisiana, at bottom a part of the establishmentarian power structure of the country, cannot overcome the government of the United States. The Johnson Administration will succeed either in nullifying the investigation or in reducing its impact to insignificance; failing that, it will settle for a limited Communist conspiracy - it does not want to exacerbate relations with the Soviet government while it is engaged in Asia. The price the government would have to pay for this

"solution" would include public realization the Dallas police manufactured evidence against Oswald to make him appear a double murderer, the FBI supported the frame up, and the Warren Commission rationalized it.

A Communist conspiracy was one of the original aims of the assassination which sought to reverse the Kennedy policy of seeking an accommodation with the Communist world and the rebellious forces in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Johnson robbed the plotters of their Communist conspiracy by his policy of denuding the assassination of political motivation and character in pursuit of tranquility at home and continuity, temporarily, of foreign policy.

But pressure to establish a Communist source for the assassination of President Kennedy has been applied by right-wing elements whenever opportunity arose. Thus, the Associated Press reported on August 9, 1964 from Washington while the Warren Commission was at work: "The House Committee on UnAmerican Activities said today that propaganda and agitation by the Communist party led to the assassination of President Kennedy...Mr. Willis said President

Kennedy had been slain by a man 'whose life and conduct - by his own admissions and actions - was shaped largely by Communist propaganda'." The Warren Commission Report repeated the slander that a commitment to Marxist beliefs conduced to murder. In Novemebr 1966 exCommissioner Senator Richard Russell discredited the Commission altogether with the statement that contrary to the Report for which he had voted it was always his belief more than one man had assassinated the President. Russell, a consistent and principled reactionary militarist and segregationist, obviously, could not have had an antiCommunist plot in mind. The implication of his comment was, clearly, a Communist conspiracy.

Garrison's Communist plot would have the effect of realizing what the conspirators intended originally in this respect.

But a Communist plot to kill Kennedy, uncovered in 1967, cannot have the impact it would have had in 1963. It is not all likely now to precipitate a national wave of hysterical antiCommunism as it was almost sure to do in 1963 with drastic impact on the foreign policy of the United States. *at*

Nevertheless it is appropriate to note Garrison's disclosures of a Communist conspiracy came at a time when the consular treaty with the Soviet government is awaiting ratification in the Senate, expanded trade with Communist east European countries is fostered by the Administration and resisted by antiCommunist interests, and the pressure for peace in Vietnam is increasing in this country and abroad. How can we make peace with the Communists who killed our President?

Whether Garrison's investigation collapses, peters out, or develops as an out-and-out frame up remains to be seen. But already it is both a triumph for the reactionary right and a diversion from the truth.

Thomas Starn
3/7/67