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S P R I N G P L A N T I N G

Three items about the assassination of President Kennedy, culled from publications in widely separated parts of the globe before the outbreak of war in the Near East, suggest political horticulturists have been at work planting seeds of confusion and flowers of evil:

1) The National Enquirer of April 16, 1967 proclaimed "Startling New Evidence - Cuban Agent Secretly Held by U.S. Told of Plot 8 Days Before JFK Assassination." A sensational "scoop" by Stanley Ross recounted the travail of Pascual Enrique Ruedolo Gongora, 45 years old, arrested on Nov. 14, 1963 "by Federal agents in Manhattan on suspicion of being an agent of dictator Fidel Castro's government. At the New York office of Department of Immigration and Naturalization...a top official...said that Gongora admitted that he was a Castro spy - and then startled his questioners by boasting: 'We are going to kill your President. I am only one of three in my assassination cell. But there are six to eight other groups sent by Fidel to kill Kennedy...Fidel...is certain...the CIA and Kennedy sent agents to assassinate Dictator Rafael Trujillo...and Premier Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. Fidel is convinced he is the next name on Kennedy's liquidation list. He is going to get Kennedy before Kennedy gets him'."

During the interview Gongora, wrote Ross, "produced a hunting knife from a brown paper bag and lunged at an immigration inspector wounding him..."P.A. Esperdy, director of the New

York regional office of Immigration and Naturalization, explained Gongora had not been arrested "since the police knew Gongora was crazy" and "could not have been convicted..." Instead, according to the Enquirer, Federal authorities tried to deport him to Cuba via Spain where he was jailed pending his acceptance by Cuba. Following refusal by that country Gongora was returned to the United States where his "very existence" was concealed. In February, 1964 he was lodged in the Federal House of Detention in New York and then "silently transferred to Bellevue Hospital on March 11. Twelve days later...the doors of Creedmore closed on the man who knew too much."

When El Tiempo, a New York Spanish-language newspaper, learned Gongora's whereabouts it applied for a writ of habeas corpus. At a hearing before a New York Supreme Court Justice, Gongora affirmed his sanity, said he had received no treatment, wanted to be released, and refused "to tell anything more of what I know about Castro's plot to kill Kennedy until I am released from here. The last time I talked, I was put away..."

New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison who, according to the Enquirer writer, "had been looking for Gongora for a ~~long time~~ long time..." was watching the case "very closely."

2) The front page of The Daily Star of April 22, 1967, Published in Beirut, contained a one-column, three-line head: Puerto Rican/'Involved' In/JFK Slaying/ and a dispatch under it datelined "Manila, April 21 (R)." What (R) signifies I do not know. According to the seven-paragraph account, Philippine police held a press conference at which they produced

Luis Angel Castillo, "a 24-year old Puerto Rican," who, they said, told them while under the influence of a "truth serum" he "was one of a group of about 15 men assigned to kill" Kennedy. "He was given a rifle and put in a high building with instructions to shoot a man who would be in an open car in a motorcade together with a woman and another man. Castillo told the police another man had disassembled his rifle after they heard that somebody called Joe had already 'got the man.' Then he had driven to the city airport and flown to Chicago."

Questioned by reporters, Castillo, who "never raised his eyes," said he "had been given drugs while in the United States, and when "in a trance...was involved the assassination attempt." When asked by reporters "to admit or deny that he was involved in a plot to kill Kennedy, he said, 'I must admit it more than I can deny it'."

Although Castillo had been the beneficiary of a truth serum and presumably had told all, the dispatch which did not explain why Castillo was in police custody, had no word about the personal or political identity of the individual or individuals who made the assassination assignment, nor of the place and time it was made. Nor, apparently did the police know, for they said Castillo "could possibly have been in the actual assassination attempt, part of an alleged assassination plot being investigated by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, or a member of a Cuban assassination group." Apparently the police inclined to the third possibility; they informed reporters Castillo had spoken of hearing Castro talk of " 'that bastard Kennedy' " plotting the premier's death.

3) The May issue of Atlas magazine contains an article, "Why JFK Was Shot," by one Bob Dirix. The piece, described on the cover as "An Incredible Tale from Belgium," was translated from Special, published in Brussels, Belgium. The original date of publication is not given; the May issue of Atlas appeared in April. As told to the writer by "Peeters," an admittedly fictitious name, the latter learned in September 1963 from a drunken Russian merchant seaman on his way to the United States "a secret that could really endanger world peace." The Russian confided to "peeters" Kennedy would be killed because he was a "peaceful man," whereas his successor "will expand the war in Vietnam," and this would lead to war between China and the United States, enabling the Soviet Union to become "the new and first world power." "Peeters" informant told him "Everything has been set up, every step has been taken to silence the assassin." "Peeters" warned Kennedy by registered letter, sent airmail and marked "Personal" on November 9, 1963. The International Administration of Postal Services informed "Peeters" in February 1964, in response to his post-assassination inquiry, his letter had been delivered to the White House on November 21, 1963. "The Antwerp seaman, Peeters," wrote Dirix, "is certain... the plot against John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the work of Communists."

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Obviously, the three pieces differ markedly in details. Considered separately, each is a gross improbability, characterized by contradiction and ambiguity. Each seems to be a

variant of Garrison's account of the assassination. All three have the effect of diffusing the impact of his revelations and of making their validity dubious; they complement the sustained effort of the press to discredit Garrison's case by exposure of his methods and witnesses. In all probability, search of the world press would turn up other "solutions" of the assassination of a like kind. Appearance of these three pieces at virtually the same time in widely separated parts of the globe suggests they were planted by a U.S. government intelligence agency; and they may be construed as a part of the government's counter-attack following Garrison's initial assaults on it. Another aspect of these stories, however, strikes in the opposite direction - against government policy. All three pieces hold the assassination to have been a political murder plotted by foreign communists. In this respect they controvert the government's case of an alienated, antisocial, solitary assassin, and challenge the Administration policy of denuding the assassination of political motive and significance. Attribution of the assassination to communists was one of the original aims of the assassination the authors of which intended to precipitate a nationwide wave of anti-communist hysteria as a cloak to hide the true origin of the assassination and as self-evident cause for reversal of the Kennedy's government policy of seeking accommodation with the established communist, and revolutionary emerging, worlds which Johnson has continued with respect to the Soviet world and reversed with respect to southeast Asia and other areas.

In sum, these stories are an amalgam of contradictory elements. They are susceptible of interpretation as a sort of compromise result of a conflict between antagonistic forces and interests. On the one hand, easily detectable, is the Administration whose interest is served by derogation of Garrison's investigation. On the other hand, less visible, is the force which, apparently, is not free to project its anticommunist assassination line openly because it has only a share of governmental power and does not control the seat of power. The most likely candidate is the CIA.

Garrison's initial attack on the government's assassination policy posited a conspiracy by anticommunist Cuban exiles, thereby implicating the CIA. It was a dangerous position for a nationally obscure southern district attorney with only a local power base and only tenuous local support. His timing made it worse for his attack came in the midst of sensational revelations of subversion of faculties, students, unions, foundations, publications, and publishing houses by the CIA. Following counterattack by the establishment, Garrison changed his script without changing his cast of characters to project a communist source for the assassination, thereby seeking accommodation to prevailing southern and governmental anticommunist forces. Counter-attack by the establishment and political volte face by Garrison gave the CIA opportunity to advance its anti-communist line while simultaneously undermining his case.

His attack blunted and his case discredited, self-interest dictated retreat with "honor" for Garrison. If Ramparts (The Inquest by William Turner, June 1967 issue) can be believed, Garrison has taken a third position: he "attributes assassination to a 'powerful domestic force'," but also "has relayed word to the President, through a Louisiana senator, that he seeks only the truth and will step aside to let the FBI make all the arrests and issue the press releases." Sic transit gloria Garrison!

Thomas Stamm

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