

October 20, 1975

Dear comrade Claudette,

The two-page spread on the assassinations of President Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King in the March 21, 1975 issue of Workers World which you sent me is very interesting. Thank you. In return please find a copy of a letter to comrade Marcy about his article in the issue you gave me when we met in the subway about ten days ago, to which I am awaiting a reply. If you remember I began to read as soon as the paper left your hand and gave myself no opportunity to tell you how well you looked and what a pleasure it was to meet you again. Karen was pleased when I told her about it.

I would like to discuss the material you sent me which is written, it is clear, from an anticapitalist standpoint and ~~is~~ suffused with hatred of and contempt for the ruling class. Also unmistakable is the conscious effort to expose its villainy, an indispensable revolutionary task. But these articles relate the assassinations analyzed in them to the intracapitalist class conflicts which generate them only in general abstract terms: "terrorist organizations;" "a wing of the rich ruling class;" "the right wing;" "liberal capitalists;" the "liberal bourgeoisie." Apart from "the military," specific ruling class interests are not identified. The assassinations are not related to the class struggle between workers and their exploiters and oppressors in the United States. Nor is analysis made to explain why workers ravaged by "inflation" and unemployment, and ghettoized and dehumanized by American capitalist society had a stake or should be interested in the assassinations of the wealthy head of state and his brother, who represented one complex of financial-industrial interests, in behalf of a rival group of imperialist interests. /w

The terminology in which the abstract ideas of the articles are couched suggests the writing was not addressed, in the first instance, if at all, to unclass-conscious workers imbued with illusions of freedom, democracy, and the "American dream." In "Why did ultra right want Kennedy killed?", Deirdre Griswold elaborated an insightful answer to "the question puzzling some progressive people" whose class origin or status she did not identify as individuals or as a group.

I do not know comrade Griswold whose beautiful first name evokes Irish legend and John Synge's play. So I wonder if her strange addressee, so oddly out of place in a publication with a attractive name, Workers World, is not an artefact from former days when she "was executive secretary of the Citizen's Commission of Inquiry (the Mark Lane Committee) to investigate the Kennedy assassination," a group which attacked the evidence against Oswald effectively but only on legal-evidentiary grounds, and not the conspiratorial frame up of a revolutionary worker who affirmed his innocence, called himself a patsy, and identified himself politically while in police custody, as a Marxist; and was denounced by the Soviet government as a Trotskyist. In 1964 Lane, who exemplifies Lenin's tart and apt characterization of lawyers, rejected suggestions that he was alleging conspiracy in the assassination of Kennedy. Lane later "progressed" to charge the CIA with authorship of the murder but not to ~~the~~ defense of Oswald the Marxist and ~~the~~ rebuttal of the Warren Commission's slander of Marxist belief as a contributory cause of the assassination. I was sorry to see that comrade Griswold opened her article with Lane's old defense line and did not advance beyond it. The

"the Kennedy assassination," she explained, "can probably be best understood by making an analogy with France" when "the Secret Army Organization (OAS) was born to carry out terroristic activities aimed at continuing the Algerian war" and "made several attempts to assassinate DeGaulle." But in the "lead article" of the "special issue of Workers World" of November 26, 1963, headlined "Behind the Assassination," it was written: "Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the scheme of the conspirators is based on the classical experience of the Nazi takeover - the Reichstag fire - which Hitler prepared and utilized to smash the Weimar Republic..." (Excerpts republished 3/21/75)

Seemingly contradictory, both analogies derive from an incorrect approach to historical development. To be sure, all coups and all assassinations, like all historical events, have common features. It is a truism for Marxists, for example, all historic events in class society have class content. That axiomatic thought, however, is a generalization and abstraction, insufficient in itself to explain a single historic event. Knowing that wars are fought for conflicting class aims does not by itself enable us to determine the class interests and aims of the adversaries in the peasant wars in Europe in the sixteenth century, for example, from the Napoleonic wars of the nineteenth century; or to explicate the American revolutionary and civil wars, not to speak of the two world wars and the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. And all the innumerable other wars since civilization began.

As with wars, so with revolutions and counterrevolutions, with history in general, including assassinations. Each event, in Marxist thinking, is a component part of larger history which it embodies in specific content with respect to origin, development, and ongoing consequence, in an unending chain of social evolution. Analysis of any event in Marxist thinking relates the part to the whole, the specific to the general, and may not sacrifice one to the other.

Happily, comrades Griswold and "Excerpts" avoided restriction to specifics of evidence, personalities, and agencies, the stock-in-trade, now as before, of Lane and company; and reached for the class content of the Kennedy assassination. But, unfortunately, they did so in general terms of intracapitalist class conflicts and, instead of coming to grips with the specific economic and political interests in conflict, had recourse to historic analogies. They attempted to explain the assassination of the head of state of the United States by earlier attempts on the head of state of France and by the arson of the German Reichstag in Berlin thirty years before, overlooking the fact that "the capitalist class" is, like the working class, a variable aggregate in continuous development within the limits of its fundamental social nature and role. The American capitalist class of the era of American domination of the world capitalist market is a much different beast from its post Civil War progenitor. And from the French and German capitalist classes of recent times.

To their error of method, comrades Griswold and "Excerpts" added errors of misjudgment. Their analogies are basically inapplicable. The attempts on DeGaulle took place at the moment of the virtual extinction of the French empire, when French imperialism was at its nadir. Source of the attempts were the military, frustrated by defeat in IndoChina and failure in Algeria, and the French colonial bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie in Algeria, suffering from loss of

property, political power, and social privilege; victims of the accommodation of French capitalism with the nationalist revolutionary forces of the so-called Third World.

The Reichstag fire, which was not an assassination and not the work of a conspiracy, was a fortuitous circumstance. It was not planned by the German government nor executed by the Nazi party which had obtained power a month before the fire in accordance with the constitutional processes of the Weimar Republic. The Nazi government misattributed the fire to the communist party and made the occasion an opportunity and justification for the suppression of all workers' organizations, all political parties, and all civil liberties; abolish the Weimar Republic; and replace it with the totalitarian, imperialist Third Reich in a desperate effort to rescue German capitalism from total collapse. *from / must of*

The Kennedy assassination, occurring at the peak of American imperialist power, had its conspiratorial source in interests grown mighty in the cold-war conflict with the "communist" world, following World War II, was directed against historically older interests seeking accommodation with the soviet and "third" worlds; and was the necessary prelude to replacement of the older interests by the newer in determining government policy; and also the prelude to large scale military intervention in southeast Asia to maintain and expand American imperialist interests.

Van der Lubbe, the German revolutionary arsonist, was tried, sentenced, and executed by the Nazi government in accordance with the law of the bourgeois democratic Weimar Republic.

Oswald, an isolated Marxist, who was framed as Kennedy's assassin and executed before trial while in police custody, was convicted and defamed posthumously by the bourgeois democratic government of the United States. His memory must always be a reproach to revolutionists who failed to come to his defense while he was alive - comrade Griswold wrote in 1975, "It was clear from the moment that Oswald was arrested that it was a set up to create an anticommunist hysteria" - and to clear his name after he was murdered and defamed by our class enemies.

Had comrades Griswold and "Excerpts" directed their analysis to the specific nature of the Kennedy assassination they would have had a sound basis for analogizing its common features with those of other assassinations. Even so their choices of the DeGaulle attempts and the Reichstag fire would invite questions: why those events? Were there not assassinations closer in time and place than the Reichstag fire of 1933 to ponder?

Comrade Griswold devoted four paragraphs to the overthrow and assassination of dictator Diem of South Vietnam three weeks before Kennedy was killed without explicit consideration of possible connection between the two murders. She included the disclosure "Diem was killed because he had been engaging in secret negotiations with North Vietnam for a possible end to the war," after speculating "Whether John Kennedy would have made the decision to back off from a massive war in IndoChina...may never be known," and noted "The Kennedy assassination was followed almost immediately by a full scale escalation of the war." What comrade Griswold didn't know, apparently, was that Kennedy had made the official decision to withdraw from Vietnam in the

month before Diem and he were killed. The decision was embodied in National Security Action Memorandum #273 which was formulated in accordance with official practice and altered after his death by the addition of language establishing the bases for escalation of American military intervention in Vietnam. The story is documented by Professor Peter Dale Scott in Vietnamization and the Drama of the Pentagon Papers, an essay he contributed to Volume V of the Senator Gravel Edition of The Pentagon Papers, published in 1972 by Beacon Press, which the government tried to suppress, and the significance of which both defenders, wisely, and assailants, stupidly, of the official account of the assassination have totally ignored. Had comrade Griswold been intent on explicating the specific class content of the Kennedy assassination, she could not have missed documentation of the triggering motive for the killing. And she could have related the assassination of South Vietnamese president Diem to the assassination of American president Kennedy in an analysis in which both murders were symmetrically opposite necessary steps in a single strategy of imperialist policy.

In electing analogies as modes of explication of the Kennedy assassination why did comrades Griswold and "Excerpts" chose only European events? Had they no thought for previous American presidential assassinations? What were the common features of these assassinations? Were they the outcome of intracapitalist class conflicts? What was the nature of those conflicts? If the Kennedy assassination conspiracy was based on the "classical experience of the Nazi takeover-the Reichstag fire:..." ("Excerpts") of 1933, on what identical or different experience, "classical" or otherwise, domestic or foreign, was the Lincoln assassination conspiracy of 1865 based? Come to think of it, on what experience was the Nazi takeover based?

Why did comrades Griswold and "Excerpts" overlook the opportunity to explore chapters of American history and eke analogies from European history? Am I mistaken in seeing in their misuse of Marxist ideas in connection with the Kennedy assassination a small reflection of the great shortcoming of the American revolutionary movement in general in failing to root itself programatically, in addition to its internationalist orientation, in American history and the specifics of the class struggle in the United States? What do you think?

If we can discuss these problems I will be delighted. In the meantime I want to thank you for creating the opportunity.

Fraternally,

*Thomas P. Sauer*

*The assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King another time.*