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FILE

OBSERVER

B November 21 1980

Dear Trevor,

It is hard talking about the Bishop story on the phone, not least because we seem to have different handles on why we should be publishing. Perhaps, instead, we should be having a drink over the thing. Meantime, here is a summary of how I see it - and a note on developments.

I assume we start from the same point - that the Kennedy assassination, although ill covered, is a seminal event and story of our time. With the coverage in the summer, it seems to me that the Observer was saying that, and that new evidence must be developed and pursued. As a reporter, I believe that - when officialdom fails or is inefficient - reporting must be combative and innovative. I imagine that you feel the same. End of credo.

The bare rigging of the Bishop case is as follows. A top anti-Castro political/military figure has alleged, and only when approached by the Committee investigator first, that his US Intelligence case officer met with alleged assassin Oswald before the Kennedy murder, and later tried to fabricate evidence linking Oswald with Cuban and Soviet diplomats in Mexico City. Early investigation showed that Veciana was credible on many points, but failed to produce proof of his assassination-linked allegations. (Such proof is likely to remain elusive.) Inquiries did, however, appear to make progress on the crucial matter of "Bishop's" true identity. There were vital leads to be pursued, on one of the few specific leads in the case which offer a major potential breakthrough. Yet, in the face of every effort by its own investigator, Congress' Committee on Assassinations failed to pursue the matter as well as you and I would expect of even a competent newspaper. (There is no gap between Fonzi and me on this - I said as much in my book. The Committee failed badly in this key area - either for reasons of inefficiency, or conceivably because of the Chief Counsel's obsession with the Mafia.) When we published, I told you of these inefficiencies, and selected one glaring example of omission that might bear fruit. Two weeks' research - which was a gift-horse by investigative standards - gave the Observer and me the first important breaks on the story for two years. For the first time, we established without question that Bishop did indeed exist. And the witness who provided that break came up with a new name. The name led quickly to a "reporter" whose record over twenty years shows a clear affiliation to rightwing causes, to inflammatory coverage of Alpha 66 at the

vital period in the Kennedy administration, and of Chile when the principal "Bishop" candidate, Phillips, was running the CIA programme to unseat Allende. The fresh witness, Prewett, (caught unawares by an unplanned interview) denied ever having met Phillips. Phillips, also caught without warning, said he did know Prewett. The Prewett area deserves trenchant further enquiry, whether by reporters or by officialdom. If we cannot afford to take it further, we must press officialdom to do so.

Meanwhile, our enquiries led to the naming of the key witnesses in the matter of identifying Phillips as "Bishop". We, via Leigh, interview them for the first time. The one who appears to be protecting Phillips, B.H., now screws up his story in important aspects. The man who named Phillips as Bishop is now shown to be consistent and reliable in ways we did not know of back in the summer. We establish that the Committee failed to follow up other vital points, failed to hear these last witnesses on oath, failed ever to question the man who, Veciana thinks, probably effected the introduction between himself and "Bishop". Other details start to drop into place -- e.g. the first public revelation that Phillips, who has in the past gone out of his way to smear Oswald over his alleged contacts with communist officials, was in fact the chief of the CIA unit responsible for the suspect omissions and cock-ups over surveillance of Oswald in Mexico City. Meanwhile, Phillips ~~stands~~ pressure for in the wake of my book -- shows new apparent cracks in his story. In interviews for the Observer, both Chief Counsels of the Committee assert that -- to put it bluntly in this private letter -- Phillips perjured himself before the Committee.

Now, with publication of the Fonzi article, there are specific moves afoot to give the key witness, Veciana, immunity from prosecution to prove that he did receive the sum of money he claims Bishop gave him, and how he disposed of it. Veciana has agreed to provide this explanation.

An interview last week, with a high-ranking CIA officer, indicates that a Congressional Committee will next year press enquiries into the identity of Bishop. Meanwhile, the Justice Department has commissioned the National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Foundation to conduct further enquiry into the scientific evidence, and a spokesman says the Department would re-open the case judicially if the acoustics evidence stands up. (My guess, however, is that the Department will fudge the issue -- especially under a Reagan administration.)

If this story was a British one, I cannot imagine any hesitation about publishing. The American press has been hopeless on this case, and now prefers not to know. That's not our position, and I think it is right for a major international paper to report developments, and bring all pressure it properly can on one of the most serious stories we've ever covered. As it happens, we have our own key breakthrough to report, plus the hardly insignificant news that the assassination caused the Soviets to go on nuclear alert. The reason they did is specifically linked to Oswald's supposed links to communist officials, and that is the key factor in the Bishop story.

I don't think publishing has anything to do with the fine differences between Fonzi

and me, but simply with the valid reporting we've done. I think, in the event, the  
and me, but simply with  
delay since summer has been helpful - we can now take advantage of later developments  
and of the Fonzi article. Perhaps, too, we should do some of the further research  
outlined on the next page - above all the Lobo interview in Spain. But I don't think  
this should become a throw-away piece alongside reviews of the forthcoming books about  
the forensic evidence and the Mafia. If we do that, we'll be doing exactly what US  
officialdom has done - to shy away from, or soften, coverage of the US intelligence  
factor in the case. And that is, after all, the "best" story of all.  
I'll rewrite, but I'm sure we should run the story.

Cheers,

Anthony Summers