The Conspiracy Corner

by Art Steuer

Who Killed Adlai Stevenson?

Mr. Walter Lippmann—who, in his relative importance to the fate of the empire in the reigns of Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, may someday be likened to the role of Seneca as tutor, critic and counsel to the emperors Caligula, Claudius and Nero—wrote recently in (of all places) *Newsweek* something to the effect that "the tragic fallacy of the illusion of empire is when Caesar conceives it his duty to establish order upon the world."

Perhaps Lippmann didn't put it exactly that way (or that well), but we are not likely to see this grand elder journalist" strolling around the corral with LBJ or CBS the way he did with Ike at Gettysburg.

After Seneca's last interview with Nero, he departed from Rome "as if detained at home by his weak health and philosophic studies." In 65 A.D. a centurion brought him orders to end his own life on charges of complicity in a conspiracy against the Emperor.

Lippmann, wherever he may be—Maryland, Virginia or some such place beyond the pale (or shadow) of the District of Columbia—is probably not expecting a formal visit from the F.B.I., but believers in the Great Conspiracy Theory (GCT) would not be surprised to read his obituary any morning along with those of JFK, Malcolm X, Lee Harvey Oswald, Matt Murphy and Adlai Stevenson.

A few short years ago political paranoia was the exclusive province of the righteous Right. Level-headed liberals scoffed at the proposition that history could be manipulated by a mastermind with a moustache in Moscow. "It is too easy," said the Left, "to place the blame for all accidents and failures, deaths and disappointments, upon a great conspiracy."

But the hysteria of the '50s which made Joe McCarthy the Grand Inquisitor was only a reflection of an age-old conviction of Man's: that where there is evil there is someone or something behind it or beneath it. How simple it was when there was only *one* Great Conspiracy: Lucifer versus the Lord, and all sin could be traced directly to the Devil's inspiration.

Now, of course, we are too sophisticated to believe in either Heaven or Hell and, believe it or not, we are stuck with the earth, at least temporarily. Even James Bond found out that there was something worse than SMERSCH, a super organization called SPECTOR. We all know there is a Mafia, though it is called something else now, but whatever it is, it controls all the good things in life, like gambling, drugs and prostitution.

The Communists themselves are counter-plotting against each other and since the aspects of evil have multiplied upon the earth like the birds in the air and the fish of the sea, why shouldn't the liberals have a notion of doom like everybody else?

There are at least a dozen books published concerning the various theories of conspiracy around the assassination of JFK (and more in the works), and while each has some inkling of the truth none are adequate, though nevertheless valuable, if, for nothing else, as reassurance that there are other people out there who are looking for the truth the way you are.

It *is* there, the Great Conspiracy. All about you there is evidence, if only it could be correlated. What we need is *proof*, and the enemy is slick as well as sinister. (He's *got* to be—or else he wouldn't be where he is: in control of *everything*.)

At any rate, it is too late for any of us to be coddled any more under the false comfort of a security blanket. Let's be out with it. It's all fixed from the Pope's visit to the Liston-Patterson fight (take the Pope in 4). That is not to say there is no human element to be computed. Even though Liston dumped twice and Clay has never fought for real you can't *absolutely* count Clay out (Patterson couldn't) because he *might* be able to.

The tipoff to Adlai Stevenson's untimely disappearance was when the Birdman himself flew to the funeral. (He didn't make Churchill's.) Big Daddy never goes anywhere except to be seen. He didn't like Adlai, not even a little bit. There is no record anywhere of their ever having held a cordial conversation.

They opposed each other in JFK's Cabinet over the Bay of Pigs (a Fiasco compared to the Santo Domingo coup), and as long as Stevenson remained our Ambassador to the U.N., our President made no point of visiting him before he became a corpse.

G. C. T. experts (those who can tie Elijah Muhammad with Robert Shelton by Lester Mattox out of H. L. Hunt) point to communiques out of Paris and London filed the day after Stevenson's death.

From Paris came a bylined story by David Schoenbrun in which he reported a dinner conversation between himself, Mr. Stevenson, and Ambassador Averell Harriman, which had occurred a few days previously, and which he had held in confidence until post-mortem.

Now, before assessing the validity of Schoenbrun's statement, it is well to understand the character and position of the man who made it. Schoenbrun is the senior correspondent for CBS in Europe, stationed in Paris, which has been his home for many years.

As such, and as a man of cultivation and intellect, familiar with several generations of European dictators and regarded as a gentleman of unquestionable integrity, a measure of his stature is simply that when Stevenson and Harriman coincided in Paris on a single night, it was Schoenbrun who was their host at dinner.

Newsmen such as Schoenbrun attain a certain ex-officio status (beyond whatever official CIA or other undercover status they might have, or not have, as well), and when in social company with prominent persons, their conversations are conducted in mutual candor.

Schoenbrun undoubtedly told Adlai and Averell Harriman what was happening in Gaul and NATO, and they exchanged what *they* knew: what was going on meanwhile back at the ranch.

That Schoenbrun did not reveal the topic of conversation, which indeed was newsworthy, in his broadcasts until after Stevenson died is a further mark for his recommendation.

What Schoenbrun said finally—and we must try to understand the motivation which impelled him to do it at all (after the fact) as being, in itself, an act of devotion as well as courage—was that a point arrived in the dinner where Mr. Stevenson declared that he had been beset with a task which taxed even his own elocutionary powers: to defend in the United Nations U.S. policy in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic.

Stevenson said that perhaps history would show at

least in Vietnam that even though he was unable to find legitimate moral arguments for our participation, there was apparently no less ignominious an alternative.

But in Santo Domingo, he said, the President had made "a massive blunder" and it was impossible to even rationalize a legitimate argument.

At this point, Schoenbrun reported Harriman *ahemed*, "Adlai, you don't know what you are saying" (in front of Schoenbrun) to which Stevenson replied, "Ave, you don't know, you weren't there. For two weeks I had to sit there and go through it. I'll never know how many years it has taken off my life."

Stevenson was thinking about the emotional strain which had taken its toll upon his conscience, but he would never know how many years that conversation had taken off his life even though it was never printed until after his death. For the word was out: "Adlai's about to spill." Big Daddy punishes anyone who soils the tablecloth.

If confirmation is necessary one could not ask for a reputation more unimpeachable than Schoenbrun's himself in all of journalism than, say, Eric Severeid's.

Severeid was himself in London when Stevenson arrived a few days later and Severeid also had dinner with Stevenson. Their conversation was also kept in confidence until after his death, and when it was revealed it was shown to carry the thoughts expressed to Schoenbrun that much farther as would the intervening days require.

"I am going to quit," Adlai told Severeid. "I can't take it any more. I have only stayed because everyone would take my resignation as an indication of my disagreement with our policy, and I owe my country that much to stay until some of this blows over and I can get out with a few of my ideals still left intact. But I tell you this, I can't take it more than two or three weeks."

The next morning Adlai Stevenson was dead, on a street in front of the American Embassy, of an apparent "heart attack" though he had no previous medical history of a heart ailment and no autopsy was performed.

His body was sealed in a coffin and rushed back to the States. His pallbearers were conspicuous for their size, youth, and facelessness, and an AP reporter who stood at the bottom of the stairs has said he distinctly heard inside the rattle of bricks.

There is more to be understood by a true student of GCT, the sort of ascetic appreciation for assassination which dignifies Shakespeare's account of Caesar's wound by Brutus.

On the evening of Adlai Stevenson's death, a Chicago television station arranged for *Sun-Times* columnist Irv Kupcinet to gather friends of Adlai's into a kind of electronic wake. Among those present was Illinois State Democratic Chairman Colonel Jake Arvey.

Everyone traded affectionate reminiscences and anecdotes and memories of witty remarks by "the late statesman" and friend. But most interesting to the political historians was Colonel Arvey's recollection of a particular night in 1951.

Stevenson, it seems, had never wanted to be Governor. His lifelong interests were international. His ambition was to be Secretary of State. Toward that, he might have run for office as a Senator, where, on the Foreign Relations Committee, his experience and influence might be usefully employed.

But there was a chance to grab the Statehouse for the Democrats, and the party grabbed him. With great reluctance, he accepted. When he won with the largest plurality of any candidate in the history of the state, the bosses met in Springfield like a pack of hyenas thirsting for their share of the lion's kill.

But Stevenson took his job seriously. He found to his horror and dismay his beloved State of Illinois on the brink of disaster and though he had no taste whatsoever for administration, he determined to do what had to be done as best it could be.

The bosses never got out of the corridor. One of his first official acts was to remove the State Police from patronage. He so shook up the bosses that barely had he started than they began to think how they could get rid of him.

The voters loved him, and every day he was in office they loved him more. There was one way out: by booming him for President. Adlai would have none of that. He told Jake Arvey that he had made his promise to the people of Illinois to do the job and not only was he going to serve out his term but before he left the house in shape he would have to run for another term.

These were the circumstances which prevailed in the winter of 1951 when the State Chairman of the Democratic Party from New York, Carmine DeSapio, called a fund-raising banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria. He invited to speak all of the major candidates for nomination: Kefauver, Humphrey, Harriman and naturally the young energetic popular Governor of the great State of Illinois.

Stevenson declined.

DeSapio called Arvey. "Jake," he said, "you can't do this to me. Stevenson is my drawing card. How can I ask a hundred dollars a plate and not present the one man everyone wants to hear?" Arvey went to Stevenson. On the basis of party loyalty alone, Stevenson reluctantly agreed to appear but not to speak.

Upon their arrival in New York the Governor's party was greeted by reporters who waved a column about Stevenson by Westbrook Pegler, demanding that the Governor comment. Stevenson had not read it. It is now a famous piece of vitriol.

In it, Pegler accused Stevenson of having a love affair with Eleanor Roosevelt.

When they arrived at the hotel, Arvey pleaded with Adlai to make some sort of public statement. Stevenson adamantly refused to dignify the accusation with a reply. Arvey insisted that for Stevenson to appear at the dinner without making a statement would so disrupt the evening and so damage his personal reputation as to make him ineffective even as the Governor of his own State of Illinois.

This was the situation which was responsible for the speech made that night by Adlai Stevenson before the assembled guests. It is now legendary. Somewhere it must be recorded other than in its general tone. But, paraphrasing his words, he said:

"I have been accused of having a love affair with Eleanor Roosevelt. Since this is now a matter of public concern I believe it is my duty to explain my conduct. Gentlemen, alas, it is true. I am indeed in love with Eleanor Roosevelt. I *have* always been in love with Eleanor Roosevelt. I *shall* always be in love with Eleanor Roosevelt. Isn't *everyone* in love with Eleanor Roosevelt?"

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For nearly an hour Adlai Stevenson, with charm and with dignity, elaborated upon the virtues of Eleanor Roosevelt, and at the end of his speech, the standing ovation he received left doubt in no one's mind who was to be the candidate in 1952.

There is one more piece to this puzzle, which is that on that night after the banquet, the Governor of New York, Averell Harriman, had planned a private party just for the Chairmen and the candidates. Since Stevenson was not a candidate he told Arvey he did not believe he had been invited. It was Carmine DeSapio who arrived to escort him personally.

Jake Arvey told Chicago's midnight audience the night of Stevenson's death, "Harriman is a nice fellow, but in all honesty it was one of his worst nights. He had hoped to win the support of the powers of the party at that little get-together that night. He is a wealhy man and he could afford it. But nothing he said was right. He stammered, fumbled, and it was Adlai's show all the way. Harriman knew it, and when we said goodnight, he looked like a kid who had lost his candy."

Now there is a lot of water under the dam. The world has gone on, and you're on your way to Moscow as a Special Ambassador, and you stop in Paris. You call good old Dave Schoenbrun and Dave says, "Hi, Ave, guess what? Adlai's in town, too." You never liked Adlai that much, really, but how can you get out of it?

So now you go to dinner, and there is Adlai, positively soused . . . or *something* . . . and on the verge of a breakdown, certainly, mumbling about betrayal and ideals and principles and putting down LBJ *to a newsman!* Well, after all, what are you supposed to do? National security is at stake, isn't it?

Isn't it your duty to call Headquarters?