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PRESS CLIPS

By Alexander Cockburn

Changing Times

So we have a situation in which the two biggest stories of the Carter administration are the Frost interviews with Nixon and the Haldeman imbroglio. There's nostalgia for you. Haldeman falls from power as Nixon's consigliere after trying to undermine the Constitution. Hamilton Jordan, it seems, will have to quit town for spitting on a woman. That's what happens when you try to dissolve the imperial presidency: the Mann Act instead of Abuse of Power?

Armpit's Length

Still, let us try to get things in perspective.

The New York Times, hot from denouncing check-book journalism, spends vast sums — in the hope of making much vaster sums — buying the reminiscences of a convicted perjurer.

The head of the *Times*'s publishing subsidiary says that his company, Quadrangle Books, did not feel "under an obligation to check on the accuracy of every claim or opinion by an author."

In a three-column headline on its front page, the *Times* then banners the absurd theories of the perjurer as important news, next to a photograph of the jacket of the unchecked book published by its own subsidiary.

Small wonder that *Times* executive Sydney Gruson, no doubt suffused with the excitement of this seamless web of corporate self-dealing, announced furiously that, "We're disappointed that the *Post* decided to publish, since we had an agreement in which confidentiality was involved with a company affiliated with the *Post*, namely *Newsweek*."

Can These Things Be?

As for *Newsweek*, it is rushing out its excerpts from the book of the convicted perjurer and announcing H. R. Haldeman is "breaking his silence for the first time." Here we have a person who (a) testified before a Senate committee; (b) testified at his own trial; (c) gave an interview to Mike Wallace — for which CBS paid — and who is apparently only now, at long last, "breaking his silence for the first time."

What has been the end product of all these ridiculous maneuvers? Enormous sums of money for the *Times*, Haldeman, and his co-writer, Joe DiMona, and a preposterous and self-serving book, almost entirely silent on the role of Rebozo or of Abplanalp, speculative in its transfer of guilt to Nixon and Colson, and grotesque in its essays into diplomatic history.

A Good Laugh

At least *The Washington Post* slightly sabotaged the whole complex money-gathering venture — and gave everyone a good laugh at the *Times*'s expense. Not that the *Times* may not have been warned that premature leaking was possible. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, where Haldeman's book was being bound, it was the talk of the newsrooms both of the *Scranton Tribune* and the *Scranton Times* that prior to the enterprising Nancy Collins's arrival in town some Haldeman material was circulating.

It seems that one of the reporters on the *Tribune* told the editors that she (or he) had the material — presumably smuggled out of the bindery. The editors said they intended to have nothing to do with the great scoop, that the *Tribune* was not in business "to give publicity to that bum

Agents and Patients

Meanwhile, amid the embers of the Haldeman episode, we must prepare for some commotion over Edward Jay Epstein's book *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*. As is the mode these days, the book's theories are going through transmigrations, even while being readied for sale to the public between hard covers. First, two weeks' worth of interviews with Epstein by Susana Duncan in *New York* magazine; then publication this week of the first instalment of a version for *The Reader's Digest*; finally, the book itself in a few weeks.

A major thesis of the book is that the KGB, anxious to conceal the fact that Oswald had worked for it, dispatched Yuri Nosenko as a "defector" to the United States shortly after the assassination with the claim that the KGB had had no dealings with Oswald. Epstein is clearly persuaded by the view of the counter-intelligence section of the CIA—formerly headed by James Angleton — that Nosenko was merely providing disinformation; hence that J. Edgar Hoover's prized Soviet agent, "Fedora," who confirmed aspects of Nosenko's story which later turned out to be false, is a provocateur as well. "Fedora" still sits in the UN here in New York, presumably reading these discussions of his loyalties with some interest. Nosenko, according to Epstein, is now handling 120 cases for the CIA.

The thesis, evidently in part a counter-attack by the defeated forces of Angleton and associates on the Colby/post-Colby CIA, is already causing much annoyance and turmoil: not least in the Washington *Reader's Digest* office, where resides John Barron. It was, after all, the *Digest* which published Barron's *KGB*, which relied heavily on Nosenko, now accused by another *Digest* author of being a Soviet agent peddling disinformation. And the Washington office is also on extremely friendly relations with the FBI, which now stands charged in Epstein's book of having been the dupe of a Soviet spy for many years and which is also portrayed as having behaved with ludicrous incompetence in its handling of Oswald after his return from the Soviet Union.

Also expressing annoyance will no doubt be Seymour Hersh of *The New York Times*. In his book, Epstein says somewhat baldly that Colby one day called Hersh into his office and "directed Hersh's attention to the CIA's program of opening mail from the Soviet Union, which he admitted was illegal and which had been supervised by Angleton . . . After Hersh left his office, Colby called in Angleton and his chief assistants . . . and told them that the *Times* would be exposing their mail-opening program. He asked for Angleton's resignation and made it clear to the assistants that they would not be promoted within the CIA. All accommodated him by resigning." Thus does the book recruit Hersh into Colby's maneuvers against Angleton and his counter-intelligence apparatus.

No doubt the response will be that the book is a product of the baroque and vindictive imagination of Angleton, brooding in retirement amid his orchids. (Though I gather that even he scorns an alleged theory of Norman "The Frother" Podhoretz that Sadat's peace trip to Jerusalem is part of some particularly diabolical Soviet ploy.) Still, it all makes for an enjoyable spectacle — particularly if hearings transpire on the Hill in which retired members of the CIA start proposing that a Soviet agent still resides in the upper echelons of the agency today—a notion strongly suggested in Epstein's book. What exoneration the B-team forces would have then! Epstein's friend, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, could make the case a major issue in his forthcoming race for the presidency.

Footnote: for the record, Epstein does not suggest that the KGB prompted Oswald to assassinate Kennedy. He believes Oswald was the lone killer, and speculates only by vague implication about possible sponsors. The true theme of his book is how the FBI and the KGB found common ground in organising a cover-up after November 22, 1963.

wife of the old English press baron: Did she once shake the ash of her cigarette into the mouth of a dwarf (who was standing on his head in a New York nightclub and singing at the same time), while saying: "I hate exhibitionism."

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