

A Critic as Contributor

AS A RESULT of a series of lawsuits extending back over the past 10 years, Harold Weisberg has recently come into possession of 58,000 pages of FBI files relating to President Kennedy's assassination. The one-time Senate investigator has probably pondered the assassination longer than anyone else. He has written six books on the subject and has emerged as the most enduring and relentless critic of the government's handling of the assassination probe.

In January a postal truck drove up the tree-lined lane leading to the Weisberg home and dropped off 12 heavy cartons containing the controversial papers. Mr. Weisberg pointed them out to us when we stopped by his home just outside of Frederick. The boxes were neatly stacked in a basement area cleared to make room for them. The files themselves reposed in 10 shiny, new file cabinets, 5 black and 5 gray, lined up like guardsmen on parade. Totalling several hundred volumes, the papers weigh over 800 pounds. The photocopied pages came from three separate FBI files, the bureau's administrative file on the assassination, its liaison with the Warren Commission file and the Lee Harvey Oswald file. Mr. Weisberg, whose mind absorbs detail as readily as a blotting paper soaks up water, quickly rattled off the 8-digit numbers from the FBI's filing system for each.

"The FBI sees to it I never get the files in order," he said. "There was no worksheet, no inventory enclosed. They want to make things hard for me." To help with filing he has hired a young college student to work part time and has provided her with 1,500 manila folders. Already a team of reporters from the *National Enquirer*, a tabloid with editorial offices in Florida, has stopped by for several days to sift through some of the material.

Because of the demands made on him by several court cases which he himself initiated, Mr. Weisberg has not been able to spend as much time on the files as he would like. Occasionally he's gotten up at 4 and 5 o'clock to get an early start. He doubts the papers contain any earthshaking clues to the assassination and sees them rather as

providing valuable insight into the workings of the bureaucracy.

Recently his wife who helps with the work ran across several references to her husband in the files. Mr. Weisberg handed us one of the reports. Dated October 11, 1968 the file originated in the FBI's New Orleans field office. In it a source was reported as saying that an unnamed agency was building a case against Harold Weisberg because he was "spreading KGB propaganda." The KGB or Committee on Internal Security is the Russian equivalent of the CIA. "It's all bull," grumped Mr. Weisberg. "That bit of information was fabricated to destroy my credibility with the government. The FBI is supposed to take out defamatory material from its open files in accordance with the law, but whenever it suits its purpose it ignores that."

In the past 12 years Mr. Weisberg has acquired over 100,000 pages of government files, not only on the Kennedy assassination but also on that of the Rev. Martin Luther King. He has arranged to turn over the papers eventually to the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point for its archives.

The FBI tried to charge Mr. Weisberg \$6,000 for the recent batch of files. Claiming indigen-

cy and ill health (he suffers with a circulatory problem affecting his legs) he asked for a waiver of fees. The Justice Department ignored the request. Mr. Weisberg then filed a civil action. Relenting, the government offered the files at a cut-rate 6 cents a page. Mr. Weisberg stood firm and the court ruled in his favor.

In handing down the decision, Federal Judge Gerhard A. Gesell wrote: "The plaintiff has made a unique contribution in this area (the release of the assassination files) by his persistence through the courts and before Congress, without which there would be no disclosure..." □