

Assassination Conference Attracts Varied Types

by Tim Butz

Like the Vietnam war and Watergate, assassinations of American political figures have produced a myriad of unanswered questions. In the ten years since the death of John F. Kennedy in Dealey Plaza, murder and cover-up reminiscent of the 1930's 'Banana Republics' coups has become an accepted fact within the American political process.

At Georgetown University over Thanksgiving weekend, 200 authors, researchers, and independent investigators held a two day symposium on American political assassinations. Designed to mutually explore conspiracy theories and their supportive evidence, participants came with their ideas on 'why' and their evidence on 'how' political figures have been murdered in this country.

The conference, the first of its kind and organized by the Committee to Investigate Assassinations, was chaired by Bernard Fensterwald - the current lawyer for Watergate conspirator James McCord. Fensterwald told the opening session that the CTIA was only four years old, but that the effort to find the truth behind the Kennedy assassination had begun on the day he was killed.

Fensterwald was followed by Norman Mailer, who spoke briefly for the need of a 'Fifth Estate' to force the truth from the government. After the opening remarks, the conference began to hear panel discussions on the status of prominent assassination cases, research methodology, medical and physical evidence supporting conspiracy theories, and how the media has covered political assassinations.

While the bulk of information and discussion was centered on the murder of John F. Kennedy, there was some attention given to the murders of other political figures. James Lesar, the attorney for James Earl Ray, told the symposium that his client had not killed Martin Luther King, but rather had been framed when the Justice Department and the FBI 'wrongly solved' the King Murder. Lesar pointed out that the pattern for political assassinations is for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to seize control of the case from the local police department. The FBI and the Justice Department, he concluded, are the only organizations with the resources to follow the lead that prove James Earl Ray's innocence, and it is highly unlikely that they will ever do so.

Newsman Ronald Van Doren spoke about the attempt to kill Gov. George Wallace. Van Doren said 'There is no doubt that Arthur Bremer pulled the trigger on George Wallace. The question is 'Who pulled the trigger on Arthur Bremer?' Van Doren outlined Bremer's behavior and attacked his 'diary' as being a contrived document. The motivation for the Wallace assassination attempt was laid to expectations that Wallace would run as an independent and take votes away from President Nixon's 'mandate.'

The most interesting and also the most disappointing, panel discussion took place at the close of the conference. A panel on theories of conspiracy was presented, and its participants included Victor Marchetti (former CIA official), Fletcher Prouty (former Defense Department liaison to the CIA), Earl Golz (investigative reporter for the Dallas Morning News), Richard Popkin (author of *The Second Oswald*), Robert Brown (former Army Special Forces officer), and Peter Dale Scott (political scientist and author of *The War Conspiracy*).

Scott was the only panel participant to state the feelings of many in the conference audience. Scott charged that John Kennedy was murdered as a result of a conspiracy between anti-Kennedy corporate powers using the Federal government intelligence apparatus, the Special Services Bureau of the Dallas Police Department, and elements of organized crime as resources for their murder plan.

Other members of the panel talked of possible complicity between the Secret Service and organized crime, but their theories were weak in motivation for the murder—only Scott's charges of corporate involvement provided a believable motive for the assassination.

There were small problems at the conference. Members of the Zippie/Yippie crew from New York came down to raise hell at the meeting. Yip/Zip leader Tom Forcade, in an unbelievable display of violent sexism, upturned a table on a woman CTIA worker who had told him not to pass out leaflets for a Zippie demonstration.

The next day, A. J. Weberman began to bait Fletcher Prouty about his job with the Amtrak Corp., charging that Amtrak was a government organization. Weberman and other Zippies present were promoting Sherman Scolnick, a Chicago-based researcher who claims Mrs. E. Howard Hunt was murdered in order to silence her. Scolnick, who is known to be a publicity hound, was overshadowed by the presence of more capable

researchers, and his affiliation with the Zippies was an exercise in "who-was-using-who." While their disruptions were minor, they did serve to distract and use time that was needed for more discussion of the issues.

The Zips decided to hold a demonstration during the meeting, and about 15 of them attracted a small crowd of 60 outside the National Archives. The demonstration was called to draw attention to the fact that JFK's brain is missing from the Archives—a point that was brought out and thoroughly discussed at the symposium by Pittsburgh coroner Dr. Cyril Wecht.

The Decade of Assassinations conference ended on Saturday night with the showing of the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination. While no single theory of conspiracy was adopted by the conference, those studying assassinations finally had a chance to meet and exchange information. For many, the showing of the Zapruder film was the first opportunity they had ever had to view the suppressed piece of evidence.

While the views on conspiracy differ, the film brought out the important concept shared by all: in slow motion, JFK's head is split by a bullet from the front. The contention of the Warren Commission that one lone sniper killed Jack Kennedy from the back is totally disproved by the film, and the search for the truth continues. It will only come from those who are independent and unafraid - like those who attended the CTIA conference.