

News analysis on the
Committee on Assassinations

Congressional Integrity and the Press

BY HARRISON EDWARD LIVINGSTONE

During the two weeks prior to the first formal meeting of the House Select Committee on Assassination a series of major news stories began to break. A silence had ended.

However, there was virtual press silence when on September 17th the Committee was established and its chairman announced that the murder of President Kennedy was a conspiracy.

I see a hand flickering back and forth. Chairman Downing's statement then could prove to be the most important political statement of this century. The press was virtually silent, and if there is a conspiracy, who is really behind it? And what powers do they exert on leaders and press alike? Do we really want to know?

The first major story broke on November 13th in the Washington Post. It was based on an Administration leaked "memo" supposedly written by J. Edgar Hoover. The memo stated that Lee Harvey Oswald met with Cuban officials in September of 1963 to discuss the assassination of President Kennedy. This was a major story and the wire service dutifully carried it.

The story continues the belief Oswald was the murderer. It adds the suggestion there was a conspiracy between Oswald, Castro and the Cubans-- a new element.

Is this how the long efforts of the critics and investigators of the Warren Report are to be rewarded: we will admit that it is a conspiracy. And who, or what, will be the new patsy?

Suppose the new investigation shows Oswald to be innocent, and there is possible evidence to support this. Who then? Anyone but the real killers, it is speculated by many who are close to the new investigation.

-The rapid shell game was on: Now you see it, now you don't. It is, it isn't. It was, it was not. Watch the nut closely because all that will remain in the Government (or subgovernment) disinformation effort is to tell us that Oswald was the lone assassin of the President. Then, won't it be difficult to explain those other bullets, snipers, and existing testimony?

Last year George O' Toole published *The Assassination Tapes*. He was chief of problem-analysis for the CIA. In the book he says Oswald is innocent. If the photographs of a man who may be Oswald standing in a doorway during the murder are as they seem to be, Oswald is innocent. And there may be witnesses to this.

Truth is not easy to deal with. Like other countries, leaders will not always reveal the truth. Honest disagreement and analysis can be squelched and little is inquired into, and what then is revealed?

There are different voices with different ideas. George Bush declared that the Hoover memo was either a forgery or non-existent. Within hours he resigned as director of the CIA. There are those, such as former District Attorney Jim Garrison, who says that the CIA did it. People in Congress are saying that it was "dissident elements" in the CIA and the FBI, the Secret Service,

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Letters

If the CIA or FBI

Dear Sirs:

It was really great to read your coverage of the Congressional Committee on the assassination of Kennedy and King. Unless I missed it, *City Dweller* was the only local paper to cover such a good over-view of the unanswered questions.

Throughout the years I have personally felt that the Warren Commission did not do an adequate job-- there were just too many loose ends. I am surprised it has taken as long as it has to re-open the investigation.

Of course, what might be discovered in the new investigation may be astounding. For example, what if the Russians were behind it-- would we go to war? If Castro was responsible-- would we invade? Perhaps more frightening and threatening is the possibility that our very own CIA or FBI was behind the assassinations. And if so, what then?

Suppose it were the CIA or FBI, or both, then indeed, the American democracy is in deep trouble. And if that is the case, who's calling the shots, and for what purposes and what are their long-range goals?

These are uncertain times, and the hearings may make things even more trying and uncertain.

F. Douglas,
Baltimore

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and so on who committed this terrible murder. And the other murders

The evidence has always been there. Evidence is not one-sided: it is viewed in many ways. Such loose-ends, erratic and unexplainable "facts" are the life blood of the press. This is the throb of moral indignation that, in other circumstances, finds its way into print.

Later that week, just after the Congressmen had gone home, NBC carried a TV news report by Ford Rowan. Someone on the committee staff told Mr. Rowan that the Committee was ready to send investigators to Havana to take a deposition from Fidel Castro as to whether or not he had knowledge of the plot against President Kennedy. Can you imagine that?

THE "MEMO"

George Bush, Director of the CIA, announced that he does not believe that Hoover wrote the memo. He said, "It's my information that such a memo does not exist." Mr. Bush predicted that the memo would be proven fake or non-existent.

Now you see it, now you don't. There will be much more of this magic because the idea is to deliberately confuse us.

The Washington Post said on November 13th that "The Justice Department has discovered a 1964 memo by the late J. Edgar Hoover... The Assassination Committee has subpoenaed the memo, but no one knows anything about it or where it is. The Justice Department has not yet turned it over, even though the New York Times says it 'is part of a packet of new material found in government files that will be turned over to a Special Congressional Investigating Committee, reliable government sources said today. A

senior FBI official said privately that there was no implication whatsoever from the newly discovered memorandum that Mr. Hoover knew about the assassination before it happened.

We already know Mr. Hoover as well as others knew about Pearl Harbor six months before it happened. Informed sources say he was in Dallas with Mr. Nixon the night before the assassination. We must remember too, Howard Hunt forged cables framing President Kennedy. We must recall that Howard Hunt may have been stationed in Mexico City in September of 1963, with Mr. Phillips of the CIA.

Perhaps the conspiracy itself has surfaced. We might also look for it in the plane crash of Howard Hunt's wife. Some speculate she had documents relating to the assassination conspiracies. A government investigator claims to have seen them before he was packed off to the 'political prison' in Springfield, as Jack Anderson called it.

Why was that memo not shown to the Warren Commission? That is what the papers ask. Some one else says it is in the archives. Others say it was given to the Senate Intelligence Committee this year - but no one there knows anything about it.

I spoke to Ford Rowan and he insisted that he was not being

manipulated and that the Committee was sending someone to Cuba. He could not explain, however, what possible significance such a statement from Fidel Castro would have in our courts or in Congress. The effect was to make the Committee look silly. He said that the staffer who told him this wanted to show him how "enthusiastic" the Committee was. There were only 12 people on the staff at that time, all deeply trusted and long known people. No one there would have made such a foolish statement. The director, Richard Sprague, swore that the NBC story was "totally false," aimed at making the Committee look stupid.

KING EVIDENCE

The hatchet job on the Committee cuts deep. During its second day of formal meetings, in open session, a staff investigator speculated that he thought some documents relating to the murder of Martin Luther King may have been destroyed. It is true that the city of Memphis ordered all of its surveillance files on anti-war demonstrators destroyed. But they claim to have carefully preserved all of the King records. No one yet knows what the facts are, but the Baltimore Sun decided that "the Chief Counsel said that relevant documents that would have been in the possession of law enforcement authorities have been destroyed." The words, have been destroyed are the Sun's, not Mr. Sprague's. At no time during the press conference or sessions did Mr. Sprague say anything like this, and he specifically and numerously denied that he had any actual knowledge of evidence being destroyed.

A taped transcription of this press conference confirms Mr. Sprague's denial. "I'm not stating at this time whether in fact they are destroyed or not. We are investigating reports that we have to ascertain if that is so, and if so what had been destroyed and if so, why? I'm not going to discuss it because we have not determined whether it is true or not and until there's a determination it would not be appropriate to

discuss it."

The Sun then ran an editorial called "Avoiding Sensationalism," saying "Investigators for a House of Representatives Select Committee caused a stir last week when they charged that police officers had destroyed records," then goes on to pontificate at length that "sensationalism is a threat to the investigators, since it interferes with their ability, and the public's ability, to see the whole story in sober perspective."

Read this as a threat by this paper, and others, as fabricating stories so as to create a "threat to the investigators, to interfere with their ability, and the public's ability, to see the whole story in sober perspective," since it is the press and only the press that can create a sensation.

Now you see it, now you don't

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Maxwell Edward Livingston is an author and novelist who received his BA from Harvard in history and his JD from the University of Baltimore. He has taught creative writing at the former. He is currently based in Washington, D.C. as correspondent for the Zodiac News Service.*