

PRESS CLIPS

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Spook Leaks From Under the Rock

This whole business of who exactly conceived the idea of assassinating Castro in the early '60s is getting murkier by the day. And I don't imagine that the Rockefeller Commission, shortly to complete its report, will be much of a help in lighting the darkness. Not, that is, unless you think that its carefully calculated program of leaks, partially prosecuted with the help of General Edward Lansdale, is all part and parcel of a principled devotion to truth.

Consider this sequence. Back on March 9 the New York Times reported that former aides to Robert Kennedy, namely Adam Walinsky and Peter Edelman, had revealed that Robert Kennedy told them he had stopped a CIA/Mafia plan to kill Castro. The next day the Chicago Sun-Times quoted former Senator George Smathers as saying that in early 1962 President Kennedy had ordered him to stop mooted plans and hopes for Castro's murder. On the same day Jack Anderson more or less reprinted a column he had written in January of 1971, in which he said the CIA had organized at least six attempts against Castro (with the help of mobster John Roselli), the last of which had been made at the end of February 1963. "It is unlikely," Anderson opined on March 10 "that the final attempts on Castro could have been made without Robert's knowledge."

At about this time the term of the Rockefeller Commission enquiry into the CIA was extended. Late on May 23 David Martin of Associated Press reported that minutes of a meeting held on August 10, 1962, in the possession of the Rockefeller Commission, showed that a memo discussing contingency plans for disposing of Castro had been discussed by Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, John McCone, and McGeorge Bundy. Two days after this meeting McNamara had written a memorandum asking for contingency plans for the assassination of Castro.

Later that evening Nicholas Horrock of the New York Times filed a story printed the next day under the headline, "CIA Plot on Castro Reported After '60s White House Talks." Horrock led with the statement that, "The CIA prepared 'contingency' plans for the assassination of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro as a result of White House discussions, former agency officials have told the Rockefeller Commission." The story went on to confirm the already known fact that the CIA had been dealing with mobsters Sam Giancana and John Roselli. But the emphasis in Horrock's story was on the White House connection. "According to the former official, the White House discussions involved 'the highest level' of the administration and would not have been honored otherwise."

Late last Friday afternoon General Lansdale told AP reporter David Martin that plans for removing Castro

"by any means (Martin's words), including assassination were developed in response to orders originating with President John F. Kennedy. 'I was working for the highest authority in the land,' said Lansdale." Lansdale added that he did not work directly with the President, but through Robert Kennedy.

Walter Cronkite led off the Friday night CBS network news with this story. Next morning Newsday ran the AP story with its major front page headline announcing, "Ex-General Tells of JFK Plan To Kill or Overthrow Castro." The New York Post ran the story under the headline, "Plan to Kill Castro Is Linked to JFK."

The New York Times ran a front page story from Horrock with a more careful headline, "A General Links Kennedys To Plan to Depose Castro."

Horrock had evidently talked to Lansdale at some point on the Friday evening, after the AP story had gone on the wires. "In a telephone interview," he wrote, "General Lansdale said that at no time did he receive orders from either of the Kennedy brothers to plan an assassination of the Cuban leader." (The New York Post quoted his denial to the NYT in its story of Saturday morning.) Lansdale made some further retractions. He said that he could not recall the August 10, 1962, meeting at the Pentagon, attended by McNamara, Rusk, McCone, and Bundy. Furthermore he said he knew of no connections between the CIA and the Mafia. Horrock went on to report that McNamara said he could not recall the meeting and had told the Rockefeller Commission of

this failure in memory.

Thus we have a bizarre sequence in which the evident source for much of the material apropos the Kennedy's involvement suddenly backs into his own story. Behind this phenomenon we have the fact that most of the leads establishing the dominance of the White House in planning the assassination of Castro appear to have come from the Rockefeller Commission itself.

Furthermore we have to remember that Lansdale is one of the most seasoned covert operatives in the

business with a repulsive record extending back to the squashing of the Huk insurgency in the Philippines. Lansdale is presumably a man who knows what he wants to say and when he wants to say it, and even though he ends up with the statement that Robert Kennedy, in November of 1961, asked him to prepare a plan to overthrow Castro, he backs into the central allegation, that the Kennedys directly raised the idea of assassination.

The result of all this backing and sawing is plainly the promulgation of two ideas: that the CIA only planned assassinations under orders from above; and that the Kennedys were just as involved in dirty tricks as any Republican president. These two notions are, of course, palatable both to the CIA and to Nelson Rockefeller.

One account, explaining the sudden rush of leaks, is



Cover of the week: This vigorous evocation of Jackie, Christina, and the ghost of Aristotle appears on the front of Grand Hotel, an Italian magazine of minimal interest. The message, bottom right, is (more or less) Jackie and Christina Battle Over the Spoils.

that John McCone, former head of the CIA, presented himself at the Rockefeller Commission and, much to the commissioners' surprise, confirmed the tales about CIA-mob connections and then produced the minutes of the August 10, 1962, meeting showing quite clearly the Kennedys approving the motion of assassination among other methods of disposing of Castro. McCone also gave a copy of the minutes to the Church committee, thus leaving the two bodies eager to leak in order to avoid the possibility of being accused of a cover-up.

It's evident that a good deal of dirty work at the crossroads is going on. It was not, after all, so long ago that E. Howard Hunt was reporting that he had attempted to forge cables showing the implication of President Kennedy in the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem. Now the frightful Lansdale appears as messenger boy, then fades once the story has been gratefully grabbed by Cronkite and others. I don't imagine, despite these leaks so pleasantly derogatory of the Kennedy reputations, that we will be getting much in the way of goodies from the Rockefeller Commission. It remains to

be seen what will happen to the Church committee, though our optimism may be moderated by the fact that the corpulent lad from Idaho has allowed CIA officers to sit in, whenever CIA officers, former or serving, are being questioned. Some concession.