

Second Gun- KPFA News 2/20/74

I ought say nothing about this without first confessing a prejudice against all those involved in it going back to Charach's call to me the first time I heard of him. He then cited as unquestionable witnesses those others whose judgement I had accepted told me were the opposite. He also has a way of turning people off, including me, of building mistrust. In the east his ~~film~~ ^{film} was removed because it had no audiences and was losing heavily. This I knew long ago. Nothing conspiratorial in a bomb bombing. It was well advertised, too. Same distributor pushed Executive Action. Harper is mad~~d~~ at Charach over use or misuse, I was told...While I have my~~x~~ own reasons for having doubts and believe Harper is an authentic expert, I am not confident all this stuff is used faithfully and do have doubts about some of the representations...It seems unlikely that Sirhan could have fired 8 shots from so close and missed on all. And RFK's position depends entirely on eyewitnesses some not dependable...Because of the media and political dishonesty we are generally inclined to credit claims to hanky panky, but in this case, while I see need, I do not see it being used against Ted...Reporter friends have attended his press conference and been persuaded against him because of the impression he and his associates made, which is not the same as from dispassionate judgement of what was presented.

HW 2/21/74

It's been more than five years now since the assassination of Robert Kennedy but there are still several people around trying to prove that the killing went further than Sirhan Sirhan, who was jailed for the killing. There was a press conference about it in San Francisco today, and Jan Legnitto has details.

[Inserted here was excerpt from tape of Robert Kennedy speaking just before he was assassinated, too garbled to transcribe.]

Legnitto: Robert Kennedy uttered those words only a few minutes before he was assassinated on the evening of June 4th, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. But in spite of the conviction of Sirhan Sirhan for that crime, many investigators believe that someone else murdered Kennedy. One of those people is Ted Charach, who this morning released a substantial amount of documentation indicating that another gun besides Sirhan's was fired during the shooting, that the bullet from that gun was the fatal one, and that none of Sirhan's bullets even struck Kennedy's body. Charach, who was in the hotel pantry when Kennedy was shot, has spent the last five years investigating that assassination and has written and produced a film called "The Second Gun," which is based upon the evidence he has gathered.

That evidence consists of high-resolution photographs of the Kennedy bullet extracted from the rear of the senator's neck, as well as bullet fragments from victim William Weisel, who was also wounded in the pantry of the hotel. Those photographs were taken by William Harper, a ballistics expert who contradicted DeWayne Wolfer's official ballistics findings on the RFK assassination. Here's Charach on Harper's evidence.

Charach: Mr. Harper, of course, came to the shocking conclusion that two .22-caliber guns were involved in the assassination, that none of Sirhan's bullets ever hit the senator because Sirhan was firing from a position well in front of Senator Kennedy, and that there are no frontal wounds, and that there had to be a second gunman inside that kitchen pantry firing to the right of Senator Kennedy and from behind, because all of the wounds, including the fatal wound is from behind, from a down-to-up trajectory. Here are the new disclosures by Professor McDonald which we are revealing today, and we are submitting this information to the United States Attorney General, William Saxbe, in a concentrated effort to get a special grand jury convened and where the Sirhan weapon will be tested and re-fired under independent ballistics auspices, and which we hope will lead to a new trial in the Robert Kennedy case for Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, and of course perhaps an outgrowth of this would be that the crime labs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago, and all American centers, would be separated from the police departments, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, so that the prosecution and defense and citizens could have open access - free from hanky-panky, monkey business - because we are charging that there has been a state cover-up.

Legnitto: Later I contacted Herbert L. McDonald, one of America's foremost experts in criminalistics and the man who analysed Harper's photographs, and he verified Charach's statement.

McDonald: Basically my investigation involved examining photographs taken with the [garbled --scan camera]. These photographs, I'm sure, were taken by William Harper. He has discussed the case with me. The photographs were given to me by Ted Charach.

On the basis of these photographs it is quite evident that if the cartridges in Sirhan Sirhan's revolver were indeed of Omark [?] Industry manufacture, the slug removed from Robert Kennedy could not have been fired from that weapon. The basis for this conclusion is the number of cannellures or grooves that run around the periphery of the circumference of the projectile. There are two cannellures of the Omark [?] Industry ammunition, and the projectiles from Kennedy have but one, consistent only with Federal Cartridge Company ammunition made in this country, that is, to the best of my knowledge. I have no real knowledge as to whether the photographs purport what they are supposed to purport, but I have great confidence and respect in Bill Harper and see no reason why he would in any way [garbled - disillusion me on that fact (?)].

Legnitto: The evidence for a second gun doesn't begin or end with these three men. Dr. Thomas Noguchi, the coroner who was removed and then reinstated in the Kennedy assassination case, has consistently maintained that the fatal bullet struck the senator behind the right ear from an inch or two away. Yet testimony of the witnesses places Sirhan in front with his arm at least two feet away. It was a security guard named Thane Eugene Cesar who was holding on to Kennedy's arm just behind him. Cesar admitted that he owned a .22-caliber pistol similar to Sirhan's, but later he said that he sold it before Kennedy's assassination. Yet Charach has produced the buyer, who stated that he bought the gun from Cesar in September, a full three months after the assassination, and he has a dated receipt in Cesar's handwriting to prove it. That gun was subsequently stolen in October of 1969 in Arkansas.

The second-gun evidence was originally made public in November of 1973 at Bud Fensterwald's Washington, D.C., conference of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations. But since then it has received very little press coverage.

As for the official reaction, I called State Attorney General Evelle Younger in Los Angeles and spoke with the Assistant Attorney General, Clark Moore, who said that he had no information about the receipt of any such evidence from Charach.

Meanwhile I asked Charach if the publication of his evidence at the same time as the release of his film might be construed as a public relations gimmick, and he had this to say:

Charach: This film, of course, did open in the New York and Boston area, and we've been told that many of the prints have disappeared, which has caused us a great deal of concern and aggravation because National General had the release of this film and now of course Warner Brothers [garbled - are supposed to (?)]. It's not playing anywhere now. I'd love the people to see it. If you wanted to say, well, this is a publicity stunt, the film is not playing anywhere in the world right now - we don't even know where the prints are.

For KPTA, this is Jan Legnitto reporting.