

Post  
1/2/77

**IN THE YEARS SINCE** President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, fear of the assassin has come to haunt our

ward, the Secret Service...  
In 1963 the Secret Service...  
In the current fiscal year, the Secret Service has 1,000...  
and a budget of \$115 million. Any earlier...  
of restraining that trend was severely...  
all year by two attempts on the life of Pres...  
Ford. All the same, there are good reasons for...  
the new Congress and the Carter administration to...  
take a hard look at the costs and consequences of...  
trying to assure the absolute personal security of our...  
most important and conspicuous public figures.

Until 1963, the Secret Service's personal protection...  
was accorded the President and the Vice President...  
And that was it. Today, by various acts of Congress...  
the Secret Service also protects former presidents...  
and their wives for life, the widows of presidents for...  
life unless they remarry, the minor children of for...  
mer presidents until age 18, all "major" candidates...  
for the presidency, Secretary of State Henry A. Kis...  
inger, Secretary of the Treasury William Simon, vis...  
iting heads of state or government, other foreign dig...  
nitaries designated for such protection by the Presi...  
dent, and the persons and families of the President...  
and Vice President. That is a large part of the reason...  
for a 20-fold increase in the agency's budget in the...  
years since the tragedy in Dallas. Each assassination...  
or assassination attempt has stirred the same reflex...  
ive response from the Congress: It takes the form of a...  
bill to the Secret Service: Do you need any more...  
money or authority?

Increasingly enough, the initiative has not come...  
from the Secret Service. On the contrary, the Secret...  
Service itself has been concerned about the rate at...  
which Congress has expanded its assignments. The...  
service is understandably worried about becoming a...  
personal security agency, which it traditionally has...  
not been, instead of a law enforcement agency...  
which is how it is perceived. The Secret Service has only...  
35 per cent of its budget...  
cerned personal security, 65 per cent in effort...  
went into tracking down counterfeiters, the forgers...  
of government checks and bonds. Today the figures...  
are reversed, and the Secret Service is beginning to...  
worry about its image. The more it looks like a per...  
sonal security agency, the more it looks like a per...  
sonal security agency, instead of an investigative...  
agency, the less able it may be to attract the...  
first-class law enforcers who helped to give the...  
agency its reputation. Ironically, it is that reputation for crisp efficiency

that has increased the demand for the agency's protective services. Mr. Kissinger, for one, had the choice of using the personnel of the State Department after he became Secretary of State, but he elected to maintain the Secret Service coverage he had received at the White House. That same factor—efficiency—helps explain the popularity of the Secret Service with presidential candidates last year. As any of those candidates will readily concede, a measure of order and an aura of importance were added to their campaigns when the Secret Service came aboard. One candidate noted that the advance work on his campaign left a great deal to be desired until the Secret Service brought its technology to bear. Among other things, the Secret Service makes certain, for its own reasons, that the campaign runs on schedule. In effect, then, Secret Service coverage is a hidden, tax-supported subsidy for presidential candidates.

The monetary costs aside, another price paid for all

witness Dallas, the disabling of George Wallace, or the more recent near-miss attempts on the life of President Ford. If Lynette Fromme had been more proficient with a .45, President Ford would have been in mortal danger before his protectors could have reacted. Sara Jane Moore's aim was spoiled by an alert citizen, not a Secret Service agent.

To be fair about it, we have no way of measuring how many possible attacks have been frustrated by the service, or deterred by public knowledge that the agents are on guard. Even so, the issue is not whether some security precautions are necessary. Obviously, some protection is needed for some of our most visible and exposed officials. The question, however, is whether Secret Service protection is not being *way* overdone. Without some serious thought, the trend of the last decade is likely to continue, with the result that more and more officials will be travelling about in a phalanx of police officers. It is not just a problem for the President or for Congress, for it is not easy for either one to strip away protection that has become an accepted fact of life—unless high officials themselves are prepared to share the responsibility and accept some reasonable level of risk as an inevitable part of the price of participating in public life.

To keep Secret Service agents from becoming status symbols or *entourage* aides, it seems to us that a new set of guidelines or orders. Their shape will depend on the level of threat as it is perceived by the responsible leaders of Congress and the executive branch. For instance, it might be possible to eliminate, or at least reduce, the coverage of foreign dignitaries, as opposed to visiting heads of state; cabinet officials, unless there is a substantial justification; and the minor children of former presidents, unless there is exceptional evidence of danger. In the case of former presidents and their wives, it might be justifiable to provide coverage for several years but not for life. We would not pretend to know exactly where to draw the line. Nor is it possible for us, or anybody not privy to the facts of a particular case, to know when situations call for extraordinary precautions. As a general rule, however, it seems to us that excessive, highly visible security measures may be as likely to challenge the psychopathic impulses of a potential assassin as to deter them.

It ought to be obvious by now that there is no such thing as guaranteed, foolproof security. It also seems obvious, at least to us, that the effort to achieve it—to put the best face on what now seems to be going on—has gotten out of hand. To put the worst face on it, what may be happening is the creation of yet another status symbol for those who hold or have held power. To the extent that this is what, in fact, is going on, it is perhaps worth remembering, in this time of transition and rich promises of reform, that the personal security mission of the Secret Service is to provide protection, within reason, and not to adorn.



DO NOT think that the appearance of American officials in public, the look of a potential assassin, is not a reality we are acquiring as our leaders parade about in public, the look of a potential assassin.

How much real protection does all this security buy? Not much, judging from the record. Secret Service protection may make assassination more difficult and more dangerous for the assassin, but it is tragically self-evident that there is no guaranteed way to shield Presidents, candidates or any other public officials when they are exposed to crowds—as