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Those Secret Service Files

Jack Anderson's column, U.S. Watches Joiners not Loners (May 27, 1972) is an unjustified criticism of the methods used by the Secret Service in the protection of the President and presidential aspirants. It is quite true that in the United States assassinations and gestures and threats of assassination have been made by mentally disturbed, socially isolated individuals rather than by organized groups. The lone exception was the assault on Blair House by Puerto Rican Nationalists in an effort to kill President Truman. However, there is no guarantee that this situation will continue. With the increase in violent means of protest, one cannot predict whether extremist groups may not carry out an assassination attempt, as did the Nationalists when they sought to draw the world's attention to their cause by assassinating the President.

Assassins and prospective assassins express their personal discontents in a political idiom. Through an identification with the President, they compensate for a lack of social relatedness, personify their needs and impart a sense of reality to their beliefs and actions. While they do not have a stable membership in a group, they are very apt to show a brief interest and have a transitory affiliation. Oswald's contact with the Fair Play for Cuba movement is a case in point. The organizations cited by Anderson are not planning to assassinate President Nixon but they do not screen their members, discourage demonstrators or refuse to send literature to a prospective member pending a security check.

The Secret Service, in contrast to some other governmental protective agencies, does not publicize its activities. Yet, it has forestalled numerous serious assassination threats with due respect for the civil rights of the perpetrators. At times, their investigations have actually been therapeutic. Anderson's attack, whether it is made out of ignorance or malice is a most unwarranted one.

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