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JFK Backed the Hard-Boiled, Not the Soft-Boiled Advisers

THE TRAGIC anniversary of President Kennedy's death has just been observed. That means, in turn, that President Johnson has now completed four years in office. And in justice to both men, this therefore seems a good time to expose a current fraud.

The fraud has been perpetrated by minor members of the Kennedy Administration who have now become passionate Johnson-haters. It has been given some color of persuasiveness, too, by the course pursued by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in the matter of Vietnam. But it is still a blatant fraud.

It concerns the real nature of the fallen President's world outlook. You will find little that casts real light on the subject in Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s "Thousand Days," perhaps because Schlesinger himself was on the losing side; but the fact remains that Kennedy's world outlook was the center of an intense struggle that lasted from his election through at least the first year of his Administration.

The composition of the Cabinet was the first subject in dispute. Schlesinger, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith and other like-minded persons wanted the late Adlai Stevenson for Secretary of State, and they were almost hysterically opposed to the President's choice of Douglas Dillon for Secretary of the Treasury. (Their choice for the Treasury, if you can believe it, was Sen. Albert Gore.) Kennedy firmly rejected their advice on both counts.

THE OUTCOME of the first round, which included the semi-exile of Stevenson to the United Nations, in turn foretold the course of the struggle after President Kennedy took office. As this reporter wrote at the time, it was a contest "between

the hard-boiled and the soft-boiled eggs."

Important in this contest were the episodes culminating in the exile of Chester Bowles to India, of which Schlesinger has given a partisan and misleading account in his book. Since President Kennedy's world outlook was actually decidedly hard-boiled, the final defeat of the soft-boiled faction was a foregone conclusion. It duly occurred.

The extent of the defeat may be gauged by the real roles played in the Kennedy Administration by the persons in the soft-boiled faction who now adopt the posture of being the true continuators of the late President's thought. Schlesinger, to begin with, was always a fringe figure, cherished by President Kennedy for being excellent company, yet repeatedly under the necessity of lurking at the door of major policy meetings, in order to ask the actual participants what had been decided and why.

In the same fashion, although President Kennedy always listened to Prof. Galbraith, he very rarely took his advice; and he most conspicuously rejected Galbraith's advice, which has been most insistently pressed, on the key subject of Vietnam. As to the third member of this new intellectual triumvirate, Richard Goodwin, he too was exiled—from the White House to the State Department—fairly early in the Kennedy years.

There is some irony, in truth, in the case of the able Goodwin. For it was President Johnson, in need of an eloquent speech-writer, who brought Goodwin back to the White House and made a major figure of him. He is generally supposed to have been a Kennedy adviser, but he was in fact a Johnson adviser in the one period when his advice counted seriously.

IF YOU glance at the other side of the coin, moreover, you find even clearer evidence that Galbraith, Schlesinger and Goodwin are not Kennedy continuators. For whereas their advice weighed very little in the Kennedy years, those whose advice counted the most then had, and still have today, ideas of an altogether different sort.

Arthur Schlesinger is correct that President Kennedy had about made up his mind to terminate Dean Rusk's Secretaryship of State in 1964; and although Secretary Rusk did not press his views at all strongly while Kennedy lived. But along with the ever-present, brilliant Theodore Sorensen, the three other men to whose advice the last President give the greatest weight were certainly Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Douglas Dillon and McGeorge Bundy.

Of the last three, Dillon had moved on before President Johnson made his crucial decisions about Vietnam; but he thought they were perfectly correct decisions and he still very strongly supports the President's policy. As for Bundy and McNamara, they were the advisers, along with Secretary Rusk, who chiefly pressed a bold, firm course in Vietnam on President Johnson.

We cannot tell, in short, what President Kennedy would have done. But we can tell, with great certainty, what was thought and done by the men whose judgment President Kennedy valued most highly—as President Johnson does today. Their world outlook was, and is, altogether different from that now attributed to the late President. And they played such roles in the Kennedy years precisely because this was the world outlook that seemed right to President Kennedy.