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LETTERS

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Kennedy Assassination

Dear Editor:

The second Kennedy Assassination seems to have triggered a simultaneous nervous breakdown among your literary personnel. While I am generally in sympathy with the libertarian position represented by the Free Press, the excesses and confusions appearing in last week's issue virtually scream for some kind of responsible rebuttal. If the journalism of protest is to be effective, it must be reasoned and sensible. Some of last week's bylined stuff makes the verbal oozings of the Welches and the Raffertys seem almost sane by comparison.

Elliott Mintz says that in "the nitty gritty of where it's at," I killed Robert Kennedy. Pretty strong stuff, accusing me of murder. I accomplished this, he says, by "indifference" (to what?) by "losing faith" (in what?), and by "not contributing" (money?) to Mark Lane, Mort Sahl, and Jim Garrison.

Now I happen to have little use for any of those three demented characters, and am satisfied with the conclusions of the Warren Commission Report. Nevertheless, I would have gladly sent them money in fairly substantial sums (for me) if I had even dreamed that it would save Robert Kennedy's life. But Mintz didn't tell me until it was too late.

What Mintz seems to be saying is that Sirhan was encouraged by our (my?) failure to capture the real killers of John F. Kennedy to believe that he, too, could get away with murdering a Kennedy. This thesis (move over, Sam Yorty) would have to assume (a) Sirhan was convinced that Oswald did not kill John F. Kennedy—sufficiently convinced to risk his life on that assumption, and (b) that the failure to apprehend the real killers of JFK would in some mystical way immunize him from detection for the murder of RFK under circumstances which rendered detection a thousand times easier.

Mintz' most intriguing suggestion is that there is a tie-in between JFK's assassination and the Vietnam war because "John Kennedy had already taken the first step to withdraw our forces from Vietnam in the weeks prior to his death." What this step was, why no journalist other than Mintz has ever reported it before, and how this step contributed to the assassination Mintz does not tell us. One can only suppose that he is so exhausted by the Herculean effort involved in having finally merged his two favorite causes (anti-Warren Commission and anti-Vietnam war) into a single conspiracy, that he has no energy left with which to flesh it out to even superficial plausibility.

Less spectacular, perhaps, but even more alarming in its way is an article by one Robert Gover, "Who wanted Kennedy out of the way?"

Gover advances the thesis that the identity of the murderer is "only a detail. What's important is who wanted him dead, and why." We are now flung from the Mintz position of obsessive and morbid concern with the identity of the JFK killer(s) to the Gover position of casual indifference to the identity of the RFK killer.

Gover goes on to work himself into a lather against those people who wanted Kennedy dead, although George Wallace, an anonymous Rockefeller, and "most policemen" are the only persons receiving mention, and it is not altogether clear that even they are members of that reviled group. Moreover, one cannot quite discern whether Gover's wrath results from his indignation at their RFK death wish, or at the fact that their failure to act upon it has left Gover with no-one to blame but Sirhan, a thoroughly inappropriate candidate who wasn't even in the original script.

The article winds up with a diatribe against "absurd, cruel, chaotic" laws (specifying none) which are so hopelessly beyond repair that there is nothing left to do but destroy "the old order itself." It concludes with a ringing

rhetorical flourish: "Either we (who?) will win (the last battle) or no one will." How Gover got from the assassination of RFK (who apparently is one of the good guys) to a call for scrapping the whole system of law and order (which RFK believed in and defended as strongly as any still-living American) remains an unsolved mystery.

Aside from the illogic of this tripe, I suggest it is irresponsible journalism. The basic question, it seems to me, is whether we can continue to function within the constitutional system established in 1789, or whether changing events have rendered "the old order" obsolete. There is a place for a rational discussion of this issue in a mature publication; there is no place for the kind of know-nothing sword brandishing represented by Gover's piece. As suggested earlier, it is on a par with the wildest and weirdest mouthings of the extreme Right.

Not quite so far out is an article by Ted Zatlun about the newly-appointed Presidential Commission on violence. Zatlun does make the nice point—I've been waiting all week for somebody to make it—that the President's Vietnam policy makes him the planet's leading violence foment-er. But he spoils it all by going on at great length to denounce the Commission for all of the terrible things it will probably do—even though it hasn't yet done anything at all. I personally know a couple of the members, and wouldn't be at all surprised to

see them come up with insights and conclusions that even Zatlun could agree with.

Like his colleagues, Lawrence Lipton uses the assassination as a springboard for pursuing his own favorite vendettas—with little regard for accuracy or relevancy. Why didn't RFK have police protection? Why hasn't the question been raised by the press? (Lipton thus manages to get in his digs at both the LAPD and the press, two of his favorite targets—a not inconsiderable feat.)

Unfortunately for Lipton, the answers to his unanswerable questions are (a) the Kennedy organization declined police protection, and (b) the question was both raised and answered by the press. As a matter of fact, the police had no business sending personnel onto private property in the absence of a request—a principle Lipton would have been the first to declaim if things had turned out differently. Moreover, there is no assurance that police protection would have prevented the assassination. JFK, it will be recalled, had lots of police protection.

All in all, Free Press, a pretty dismal performance. As the late Robert Kennedy used to say, "I think we can do better."

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