

Excerpts From a Report by the National

WASHINGTON, Nov. 2—Following are excerpts from a statement on assassinations released today by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence:

Probably no other form of domestic violence—save civil war—causes more anguish and universal dismay among citizens than the murder of a respected national leader. Assassination, especially when the victim is a President, strikes at the heart of the democratic process. It enables one man to nullify the will of the people in a single, savage act. It touches the lives of all the people of nation.

Considering the high visibility, the substantial power, and the symbolic (as well as actual) importance of the American Presidency, it is not surprising that Presidents are prime victims of assassination, or that conspiracy theories attend the event. The Presidency is the fulcrum of power, the focus of hopes, and the center of controversy in American politics. What better target for those who wish to punish a nation,

strike out at a symbol of great power, or simply draw the attention of the world and history to themselves?

The evidence from American history is overwhelming: No Presidential assassination, with the exception of an abortive attempt on the life of President Truman, has been demonstrated to have sprung from a decision of an organized group whose goal was to change the policy or the structure of the United States Government. With that single exception, no United States Presidential assassin has ever been linked to such a group, either as a policy maker or as a member or hireling carrying out its directives.

It may be that persistent low-level turbulence and non-conspiratorial assassination are associated, just as conspiratorial assassination usually occurs amid other intense forms of political violence. Consistent with its principles of freedom, the United States tolerates a fair amount of political tumult—not enough to inspire political assassination, but perhaps sufficient to provide the

conditions under which the twisted mind of the assassin decides that an imagined evil must be set right through violence.

Dissidents Vocal and Abusive

Dissidents in the United States have often been very vocal and very abusive; they sometimes have heaped scorn on a President, even vilified him. Americans demonstrate boisterously, stage emotion-charged strikes and sit-ins, hurl stones and filth and foul language at authorities who, in turn, have not always been restrained and fair in their use of power.

Though an assassin is mentally deranged, the violent rhetoric of our politics and our constant flirtation with actual violence may be factors that bring him at least half-way to his distorted perception of what actions are right and legitimate.

Although the United States has differed significantly from the rest of the world in the kind of assassination it has experienced, there are indications that the future may bring more similarities than distinctions. Many of the

conditions associated with conspiratorial assassination in other countries appear to be developing in this country:

¶Political violence in the United States today is probably more intense than it has been since the turn of the century. If civil strife continues to become more violent, political assassination may well occur.

¶There is much talk today of revolution and urban guerrilla warfare by extremists, and there have been outbreaks of violence with aspects of guerrilla warfare, as in the Cleveland shoot-out of July, 1968. If extremists carry out their threats, we can expect political assassinations.

¶Even if the rhetoric of revolution and vilification of governmental authority is never translated into deed, the constant exhortation of America's institutions and leaders may destroy their legitimacy in the eyes of other segments of society. The assassinations during the Reconstruction era arose in just such a context.

Throughout the tragic history of race relations in this country, Negroes have been the victims of white terrorist murderers. To this recurring threat is added a new one: plots and murders from within the radical wing of the black protest movement. The increasing number of Negroes holding public office and positions of political prominence will thus be running risks of assassination from two opposing extremist groups. From whichever direction, such attacks would appropriately be regarded as political assassinations.

stances.

¶That state and local governments carefully review the adequacy of the protection accorded to candidates and office holders, especially Governors and Mayors, and that the protection be strengthened where it is deficient.

The responsibility for protection should be clearly delineated, and new avenues of cooperation should be opened between those with state or local protective responsibilities and the Secret Service

R F K

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1969

Violence

Racial tensions have been at a high level in this country during the 1960s. If violent racial confrontations increase, the level of political violence in the United States could approach that of countries in which political assassinations typically occur.

More Rapid Change

Finally, the United States may in the next few years undergo even more rapid socio-economic change than it has in the recent past. Rapid change is another characteristic that correlates with high levels of conspiratorial assassination.

Present trends warn of an escalating risk of assassination, not only for Presidents, but for other office holders at every level of government, as well as leaders of civil rights and political-interest groups. Accordingly, this commission suggests:

¶That the Secret Service be empowered to extend its protective service to that limited number of Federal office holders and candidates for office whose lives are deemed imperiled as a result of threat, vilification, deep controversy, or other hazarding circum-

Commission on Assassinations

and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to include a sharing both of technological information and of information about dangerous persons and potential assassins.

The precautions we are urging are worthwhile whether or not this nation faces a new outbreak of political assassinations. We do not pre-

dict that such an outbreak will occur. But we feel compelled to note that some of the conditions for such an outbreak are present or may be developing. These conditions add urgency to the need to develop effective protection against assassination.

We can only hope, along with all Americans, that the

conditions which have kept our society free of the scourge of conspiratorial assassination will prevail—conditions such as the ability of the American people to absorb radical challenge, to respond to the need for reform, to keep their basic democratic values intact even in periods of bewildering and buffeting social change.

45 M