

Stubborn questions

I have yet to meet anybody who believes we have been told the whole truth about either of the Kennedy assassinations, or even that the whole truth has been diligently sought by those in a position to find it.

Lately Governor George Wallace, victim of a presidential campaign shooting, has been expressing doubts about the "official" version of that incident. The hint of conspiracy is in the air, first in the Kennedy killings, in the assassination of Martin Luther King, and now in the attempted assassination of Governor Wallace. I don't believe it is all the result of the paranoia of our times: Facts are missing.

It was the killing of President John F. Kennedy which ushered in our bad times. I don't think it is even realized yet how the Dallas tragedy shook the nation to its foundations, dispelled in a few agonized hours a confident buoyancy we had begun to experience, and instilled the admixture of cynicism and despair with which we have been living ever since, to be topped at last by the shattering scandals of the Nixon regime.

When Robert Kennedy was slain at the moment of his California victory in the presidential primaries — in our state, the big one — a theory of tragic coincidence seemed to be stretched to the point of destruction: Who could believe it?"

In due course a weird and exotic gunman, Sirhan, was marched through the courtroom and into San Quentin where, luckily for history, the gas chamber was no longer operating. Sirhan is still available to us, if ever questions begin to be put properly and this strange fellow himself should decide to answer them.

I don't expect much to come of it, but one of our candidates for Governor, that stubborn man, Baxter Ward, has been raising the Robert Kennedy assassination issue again. He did it first as a television newsman, when for a full three months his TV news department in Los Angeles explored all the inconsistencies in the "official" version, and got no satisfactory response.

Later, as a Los Angeles Supervisor, Ward returned to his quest for facts. But the new official who had been able to drive nearly everybody else in Los Angeles government up the wall got nowhere with this, because the District Attorney — he soon found — was beyond the Board's jurisdic-

tion. He could only ask questions. He asked them. Now he is asking them again.

As in the Dallas shooting, where the physical evidence included a mysterious bullet which, judging by its nearly "mint" condition could hardly have done what the official theory said it did, the Los Angeles assassination has strange ballistics evidence.

There is no shred of doubt that Sirhan was properly tried and properly convicted. But the ballistics evidence is inconclusive as to whether Sirhan acted alone.

In the Los Angeles case, two criminologists, William Harper and Herbert MacDonnell, have independently questioned the ballistics information supplied by the Los Angeles police.

Three bullets don't match, experts have testified. One is a bullet taken from Robert Kennedy's body, another recovered after wounding a spectator, and a third test bullet said to have been fired from the weapon taken from Sirhan.

The Los Angeles police, taking note of the criticism, did issue a report. It suggested that clerical error, a mislabeling of envelopes, was responsible for the discrepancies.

But, curiously enough, although the Sirhan weapon is still in official possession, no further test firing was undertaken. Instead, officials blew up a storm-over asserted carelessness on the part of the office of the County Clerk in labeling and storing the evidence.

MacDonnell, a New York expert, says microscopic comparisons of the bullet taken from Kennedy's body show a different groove pattern from the one which wounded the spectator. Further, he contends that the bullet which hit Kennedy was fired from a weapon whose rifling was in better condition than that of the weapon from which the other bullet was fired.

There are other unanswered questions in the Robert Kennedy case, including one involving the distance at which the fatal bullet, the one that entered the Senator's head behind the right ear, was fired. Testimony and the coroner's report are at odds.

Ward isn't catering to conspiracy buffs. He has no opinion. But he still has questions. He thinks they ought to be resolved.