

## WASHINGTON INSIGHT

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## The Truth About the Abba Schwartz Case

*It was more than a humiliating incident; for the very secrecy of his "liquidation" raises disturbing questions, and may have unforeseen results.*

Hemingway has told us about death in the afternoon; Arthur Miller has agonized over the death of a salesman; but in Washington efforts are still being made to understand a different kind of mortality—the sudden political “demise” of a prominent public official.

The name of the victim (Abba Schwartz), his title (Director of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs), his rank (Assistant Secretary of State) are of course of some interest, but to those who have a clinical interest in Washington, attention centers not so much on the who as on the what and why and how, for they reveal much about the way deadly political infighting is carried on in the nation's capital.

Careful newspaper readers may recall some aspects of this case, but generally it has been reported in bits and snatches, for, as in all good mystery stories, that is the way the facts gradually emerge. In this case, we still don't have—and may never have—all the facts, but we do know enough to draw some conclusions.

First, as to the background: The Bureau of Security and Consular

Affairs was created early in the Eisenhower Administration in the heyday of McCarthyism, and, under the late Scott McLeod, was one of McCarthy's chief instruments for tyrannizing the State Department. When Kennedy came to power he was determined to clean up this situation, and his final choice for director was Abba Schwartz, a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and as a private lawyer an expert on refugee and immigration matters.

After he had been five years in office, the *Washington Post* said, “Abba Schwartz has done a superb job in the State Department in leading the long fight for immigration reform. He deserves great credit for a major role in drafting and bringing to realization the wise and decent immigration bill passed last year by Congress. If he made enemies in that fight, they are an honor to him. He has conducted the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs with common sense and humanity, granting passports in conformity with the rules laid down by the Supreme Court, and granting visas to foreigners of divergent views, confident that the loyalty of Americans to their own system of government is not going to be overturned by the arguments of itinerant Communists or Fascists. He is no believer in iron curtains.”

The editorial generally reflected the community's judgment, and even now

no one has publicly disagreed with this appraisal of Schwartz's performance. Yet when he returned in March from a mission abroad, he learned informally through a newspaper friend that his bureau and his job had been secretly abolished while he was out of the country. That's when he began to appreciate fully that there were forces that did *not* agree with his liberal conduct of his bureau, and that these forces, which still can only be guessed at, retain some of the power they exercised back in the sordid days of McCarthy.

In any case, the disbelieving Schwartz went to see his boss, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who spoke of Schwartz's possibly taking on some other, undefined, job. The Director said in the circumstances he felt compelled to leave; the Secretary did not discourage him. The President did not see fit to answer his letter of resignation with even a routine letter of acceptance, or to thank him in person for his outstanding services.

An official explanation has now been offered for this unusual liquidation: It was an “economy” measure. We are told that William J. Crockett, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration, with the help of the Budget Bureau and a White House assistant, conceived the reorganization plan which would abolish the bureau by eliminating the director and transferring his employees elsewhere in

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State. All this began last September, but for some reason it took six months to perfect the plan and prepare it for submission to Congress.

*Without Blessing*

Naturally, this raises the question of what part the President and Secretary of State played in this clandestine operation. The whole truth is still not known, but apparently they were at least not active participants. It may seem odd to the layman that the abolition of a celebrated, if not notorious bureau, plus the elimination of an official with sub-Cabinet rank, could occur without the encouragement and blessing of the Chief Executive and the Secretary of State; and yet, in a way, that seems to be more or less the fact, although it is not altogether certain whether it is more or less.

Mr. Rusk says the reorganization plan was brought to his attention last fall, and that he approved it, subject to final okay by the Budget Bureau, which came through while Schwartz was out of the country. Mr. Rusk says he was going to inform Schwartz when he returned. In fairness to the Secretary, it appears he did not initiate the action, but his handling or mishandling raises several disturbing questions. First, of course, knowing the controversial history of this bureau, how could he have regarded its abolition as just a routine matter? Second, and more importantly, how could he have approved such a radical step without consulting and seeking the advice of the head of the bureau, or at least paying him the common courtesy of telling him what was up? The humiliating consequence was that Schwartz ultimately learned his fate by accident from outside sources. Mr. Rusk says he had not wanted to disturb Schwartz until the matter had been cleared bureaucratically.

As for the White House, there has been no official Presidential explanation. Still the press has been given to understand that the President had nothing to do with the case, or at least not much. Yet, as with Rusk, this raises certain questions: Since Johnson is famous for running every detail of his Administration (including turning off the lights) how could an important bureau and an important official be "scrubbed" without his knowledge and consent? And finally,

if all this was done behind Johnson's back, why did he not veto the plan and reinstate Schwartz, instead of abruptly accepting his resignation?

It goes without saying that nobody in Washington takes seriously the "economy" explanation. Actually it is doubtful how much will really be saved, and in any case the amount involved is tip money in this Administration.

So what really happened? Who wanted to "get" Schwartz? It would take a novel to explore all the speculations, but the journalistic consensus is that it was promoted by individuals in Congress and State who have never shared Schwartz's liberal outlook, and who in any case have wanted to regain influence over the vital matters under his jurisdiction. "The Abba Schwartz story," said the *Washington Post*, "might well be headed: Joe McCarthy Rides Again."

The most suspicious aspect of the plan is the stealth with which it was executed. Ordinarily, reorganization plans become common knowledge as they are discussed and reviewed while going through the usual channels for clearance. But the Security Bureau proposal was a better kept secret than the original atomic bomb. Not even the legal adviser of the State Department knew of it for months. There was good reason for the secrecy: Those who engineered the operation obviously felt that success depended on a *fait accompli*. They apparently reasoned, probably accurately, that premature disclosure would generate so much liberal opposition that the plan could never be carried out.

To sum up: The President and Dean Rusk apparently had nothing personal against Schwartz, and were innocent or not-so-innocent bystanders; they appear not to have given enough thought to the matter; but it is a safe bet that they now wish they had. And, finally, it is even a safer bet that from now on every decision coming from Schwartz's former domain is going to be examined by the press under a microscope.

"His departure," said Senator Robert F. Kennedy, "is a loss to the government he served." This poses the problem of where the Administration will turn for further "losses" when it runs out of former Kennedy appointees.

One of the State Department offi-

cially most frequently mentioned in the Schwartz case is Miss Frances G. Knight, the comely, efficient, and acutely conservative Director of the Passport Office, which is in the Schwartz bureau. Suspicion was naturally directed at her because she got her job under Scott McLeod during the McCarthy era, and has always been closely identified with prominent right-wing politicians. She was openly contemptuous of both President Truman and Adlai Stevenson. Naturally she did not see eye to eye with Schwartz, her nominal boss.

The surmise that Schwartz's ouster would prompt closer scrutiny of the Passport Office was quickly borne out. So much so that Miss Knight already is complaining that she is a victim of what she calls "Schwartzism," whatever that is.

*Sequel*

The new screening has already produced disclosures that have aroused more attention than the original ousting of the bureau director. For the first time the press and public have learned that the State Department (through quiet requests to the Passport Office from the FBI and other government agencies) has secretly been spying on Americans abroad. Apparently the Secretary of State himself did not know about this, for Miss Knight authorized these foreign investigations without even consulting her immediate boss. Her explanation is that this has been going on for thirty years, a claim which is now being looked into.

Like the Schwartz affair, this sequel has been coming out in bits and pieces, and it is no wonder that the public is confused and mystified. With the advantage of a little perspective, however, it is now possible to see more clearly what has really been going on.

The first crack of light was a "leak" to the press that the Passport Office, at the request of the FBI, had asked our Embassies in Paris and Moscow to place Harvard history Professor H. Stuart Hughes under surveillance when he visits Europe next fall. The messages sent out by the Passport Office to the Embassies described Hughes as a man who "reportedly in the past has had strong convictions toward communism."

The official reactions of the State

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Department to this disclosure have shed new light on the deep and continuing conflicts within State on any matter involving communism, suspected communism, trumped-up communism, or even trampled-over communism.

First, the Department's official spokesman not only confirmed the surveillance, but said the practice is widespread and might even involve hundreds or thousands of Americans every year. The spokesman also said the Department intended to continue using U. S. Embassy personnel to check up on Americans traveling abroad.

The spokesman was unable to cite any legal authority for the Department's activities. He said State makes no effort to determine if a surveillance request is either desirable or warranted. "We are not an investigative agency," he said, "and would not conduct screening procedures."

### *Checking Travelers*

Any number of federal agencies, it is admitted, may request surveillance checks on U. S. travelers: the FBI, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Treasury, the Narcotics Bureau, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to name a few.

The exact manner in which these requests are handled is still not altogether clear. No one at State at first would say whether the requests had to be honored, but there is no record of a recent request being denied. In the case of Hughes, the surveillance request bore a very low security classification ("limited official use only"), which means almost anybody in the Department could see it. The spokesman did not answer when he was asked if that kind of handling did not violate Presidential orders that rigidly restrict access to derogatory "security information" about American citizens.

But the Secretary of State began to answer these questions himself twenty-four hours later when the case triggered a sharp public reaction. Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts led the demand for a full investigation. In a message to Rusk, Kennedy described Hughes as a "gentleman of integrity." The Senator also declared, "The right to travel without harassment by our govern-

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ment is a fundamental right of American citizenship. I trust the Department will take every step necessary to see that our citizens can travel with the guaranty of privacy."

Secretary Rusk's answer was that he himself was disturbed at the practice, especially the transmission to U. S. Embassies of unsubstantiated charges against Americans that have been passed along from the raw files of agencies such as the FBI. He indicated he had basic procedural changes in mind. He said he personally would collaborate with Attorney General Katzenbach in "establishing criteria" for the future. "I can tell you quite frankly," Mr. Rusk said, "I don't believe that we ourselves or anyone else should be transmitting abroad unevaluated information which has not been subjected to a real judgment as a matter of policy here in Washington."

Meanwhile, it was learned that the Passport Office had placed another professor, Staughton Lynd of Yale, under surveillance when he returned to the U. S. last December from an unauthorized trip to North Vietnam. The purpose was to obtain, among other things, a record of Lynd's "anti-American statements," which were to be used as grounds for revoking his passport. Lynd's attorney, David Carliner, said Passport officials admitted at a hearing that the behavior of American citizens here at home—including speeches—was a factor in deciding whether a passport should be granted. "They are using the issuance of passports," Carliner said, "as a means to regulate speech."

Just how far the Department reforms will go is not yet clear, but one thing is sure—Miss Knight's near-absolute rule over the Passport Office seems to be at an end. From now on, she has been ordered to consult with Philip B. Heyman, Schwartz's acting successor, before ordering any further surveillances. It was Heyman's action in rescinding Miss Knight's surveillance order on Hughes that first brought the case to the attention of the press.

As a career civil servant, the outspoken Miss Knight cannot be ousted without formal charges. "I have no intention of leaving and opening this office to a bunch of wolves," she said. In another statement, she said, "I cannot see the sense of the U. S. govern-

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ment going all out in Vietnam and having our boys murdered and mutilated, and then having lax security practices in the State Department. I make no bones about saying so." She also said, "Some creeps are out to get me." But, she added, "they don't have the guts to charge me with inefficiency or malfeasance." And they probably don't.

In her own mind, Miss Knight traces her present troubles back to Abba Schwartz. In a memo to Heyman, for instance, she said she had "reliable information" that Schwartz had said "he would drag me out with him if it was the last thing he did. His antagonism to any cooperation or contact with the FBI is a matter of general knowledge."

Asked about policy clashes, Miss Knight said, "I will issue a passport to a baboon if I can find out that that is the policy. The trouble is, I've had eight bosses in my ten years as head of the Passport Office. . . . They're here today and gone tomorrow. I will follow instructions if I can find out what they are."

Her prayer, it appears, is going to be answered. The betting is that, for the first time, Miss Knight will end up with instructions that will to some degree limit her hitherto unquestioned reign over the Passport Office. It will be the Washington irony of the year if the plot against Schwartz boomerangs on Miss Knight, with the end result being a more, rather than less, liberal passport policy.