

Restoring Faith

The interest in and the skepticism about the conclusions reached by the Warren Commission investigating President Kennedy's assassination are greater now than at any time since the report was first released. Even David W. Belin, a former commission lawyer and a staunch defender of its work, now urges that the inquiry be reopened.

The most powerful arguments for doing so come not from any of the veteran assassination buffs, but emerge from the secret recesses of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. themselves.

●Although the C.I.A. was actively working on ways to achieve the death of Fidel Castro—including arming a would-be assassin on the day of President Kennedy's murder—Allen Dulles, then director of C.I.A., failed to inform his fellow commission members of that program, nor did any employee of the agency come forward with such information.

●Having failed to inform the commission of the anti-Castro plotting, the agency also failed to provide the potentially significant information that it involved members of the Mafia.

●The F.B.I. failed to inform the commission that it had received a threatening letter from Lee Harvey Oswald, the President's assassin, less than a month before the President's death; and it went on to destroy the letter.

●The failure of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. to disclose these items of information increases the importance of such still unanswered questions as the extent and nature of Lee Harvey Oswald's relationship with the F.B.I.; the explanation of the ease with which he was able to travel in the Soviet Union; the reason for the smoothness of his re-entry into American life after recanting his defection to the Soviets, etc., etc., etc.

Mr. Belin, while continuing to believe that the Warren Commission's conclusions are correct, notes that many Americans think otherwise. He suggests that a new investigation by itself will restore governmental credibility. That is hardly likely. Few Americans were prepared a decade ago to believe in official cover-ups and murder plotting; yet even then they grew increasingly skeptical of the Warren Commission's findings. Having learned to their horror all those hitherto unthinkable revelations, their damaged faith is unlikely to be entirely repaired by one more investigation.

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Nevertheless, some highly desirable goals are within reach and it is essential that they be pursued. Much skepticism about government in general flows from the belief that secret agencies of government are unaccountable and out of control and that there is an automatic reflex in Washington to sweep embarrassments under the rug. This belief was bolstered just a few days ago by the Administration's frantic efforts to smother the assassination report.*

Such skepticism can only be eroded over time; but the flaws in the Warren Commission investigation offer an excellent opportunity to begin dealing with such issues and to dispose of some questions about the Kennedy assassination as well. The American system of self-government can hardly be deemed to be working effectively so long as major questions relating to cover-ups in the investigation of a Presidential murder remain unanswered.

A Congressional investigation laying out all the now-sequestered evidence and seeking to establish the extent of the cover-ups, the reasons why they were undertaken and the identities of those responsible for them might help in the restoration of the Government's reputation for integrity and responsibility.

*[assassination of foreign leaders]