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Warren Commission

The Warren Commission has finally rendered its report on the assassination of President Kennedy. The report bears all the signs of the greatest objectivity and care in its preparation possible under the circumstances.

The basic conclusion is that President Kennedy was shot by an isolated individual whose action was mainly a product of his personal psychological history and only indirectly related to the great social and political conflicts of our times. Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin, was then struck down, in turn, by a person whose motives must also be sought in the realm of psychoanalysis rather than sociology.

The report's comments on the actions of the Dallas police department in permitting Oswald's interrogation to take place in an atmosphere of a public relations carnival are well taken. Here we have the ancient clash of two principles: the right of the people in a democratic society to be informed; and the right of a person accused of a serious crime not to be pre-judged in the court of the mass media. The tremendous wave of emotion and uncertainty which swept the country in the wake of the President's assassination put intolerable pressures on the police to keep the country informed. But perhaps this experience will result in greater institutional safeguards against such pressures.

A word needs to be said about the Warren Commission's conclusion that the Secret Service, or some other agency charged with the protection of the President's life, should have at its disposal much more complete, electronically compiled and selected data on all persons who might be potential assassins.

No such compilation, however complete, can possibly offer sure protection to American presidents. As long as they continue to appear in public, and move about in open vehicles, they are vulnerable to the kind of person who killed President Kennedy. It is mere chance that Oswald's fantasies had taken on a political coloration. He might as easily latched onto religious or other notions.

Yet the inevitable result of this aspect of the Commission's report, if carried into practice, would be to increase the secret official surveillance of political radicals. Electronic computers require data which can only be gathered by questioning employers, neighbors and others, or by planting additional agents in political organizations. While adding to the already massive political surveillance carried on by government agencies might add an ounce to the safety of presidents — it could also add a ton to the pressures for conformity and the fear of dissent — specially radical dissent — which already weigh too heavily on our society.

Reports from abroad indicate that the release of the Warren Commission's report has not put to rest widespread popular suspicion that the whole truth is not yet out. This is understandable. The murderers of the Birmingham children; of the three young men in Mississippi; of Medgar Evers; of William Moore — and of many others are still at large. The signs pointing to indifference or collusion by public officials with private terrorists are compelling. It is difficult to blame public opinion abroad for reluctance to believe that in a country in which ordinary citizens can be murdered by a socio-political semi-underground, the assassination of a president was the work of an isolated psychopath.

There are still some legitimate questions that can be raised about the events surrounding the murder (the Commission recognized in its report that some aspects remained unclear). But the Commission's report was conclusive enough that it no longer leaves much room for reasonable doubt.

Unfortunately, a number of groups who call themselves radical but turn East instead of left, and reactionary organizations like the John Birch Society are still seeking to exploit this tragic event.

By muddying the waters, they serve to make it more difficult for civil rights supporters, liberals and democratic radicals to wage an effective campaign to bring the racist and reactionary murderers of the martyred civil rights workers and the Birmingham children to justice.

The idea that Chief Justice Earl Warren — a major focus of right wing attacks on a gamut of issues — would act as a front man for a cover-up of a right wing or Communist conspiracy to kill the late President is nothing short of preposterous. More than that, it is vicious.

In this the ultras of the "left" and right have a similar goal. They both are seeking to undermine democratic institutions.

The official investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy is over, but the official investigation of the murder and terror that continues in Mississippi and other parts of the South has hardly begun. This unfinished business demands Federal action now.