

Slander in Moscow

In isolation, the Kremlin's ban on distribution of Russian translations of the Warren Commission report on President Kennedy's assassination would be a regrettable, but relatively minor, matter. After all, when Soviet citizens are denied full access to the documents of their own history, it is too much to expect that they will get unlimited access to documents of American history.

The disturbing element in the current suppression is that it comes at the beginning of what looks suspiciously like a campaign to convince the Soviet people that President Johnson was implicated in a "Kennedy murder plot." This kind of political slander can only poison the founts of international understanding and add to the perils of a dangerously torn world.

Ironically, the book that is the basis for these Soviet innuendoes was written, according to Izvestia, "almost entirely from the Warren Commission report itself and the materials of its hearings." Against this background, there can be little doubt that the Kremlin propaganda masters fear that if their subjects can check the primary sources the theory they are publicizing might go up in smoke.

Debate on the accuracy and adequacy of the Warren Commission's work is now approaching the dimensions of a lively small industry in this country. That is a predictable development in a democracy, where every idea is subject to analysis and dissent. It is quite different from the Kremlin's ban, and the unhealthy climate it establishes for Soviet thought.