

(John Sparrow)

EDUCATOR SCORNS 'PLOT' ON KENNEDY

Johnson Aide Is Critical of
Conspiracy Theorists

By ANTHONY LEWIS
Special to The New York Times

LONDON, Jan. 2—John P. Roche, special consultant to President Johnson, has dismissed as "marginal paranoids" the proponents of conspiracy theories in the assassination of President Kennedy.

A vital argument against the existence of a conspiracy, Mr. Roche maintains, is the fact that Senator Robert F. Kennedy has done nothing to pursue it—and would surely have acted if there had been any ground for suspicion.

Mr. Roche makes these points in a letter to be published tomorrow in The Times Literary Supplement. The letter compliments John Sparrow, warden of All Souls College, Oxford, for a recent article critical of the conspiracy theorists.

The point about Senator Kennedy takes up most of Mr. Roche's letter. Mr. Kennedy was Attorney General at the time of the assassination. He resigned on Sept. 3, 1964, three weeks before the official report on the assassination was released.

"Any fair analysis of Senator Robert Kennedy's abilities, his character and of the resources at his disposal as Attorney General," Mr. Roche writes, "would indicate that if there was a conspiracy, he would have pursued its protagonists to the ends of the earth."

Close Relationship

Thus, Mr. Roche argues that "every one of the plot theories must rely on the inconceivable connivance" of Robert Kennedy. He adds that this is inconceivable not only because of the Senator's own person but because of his close relationship with his brother.

"Admittedly this is not a legal argument," Mr. Roche

concludes, "but a sane society operates largely on commonsensical notions of trust and leaves conspiratorial black masses to a priesthood of marginal paranoids."

Mr. Roche, a professor and dean at Brandeis University, is a well-known figure in liberal circles. He was national chairman of Americans for Democratic Action from 1962 to 1965. He is the so-called "intellectual in residence" at the White House, having succeeded Dr. Eric Soldman.

It is somewhat unusual for a White House aide to make a public comment on the assassination at this late date. In view of President Johnson's cool relations with Senator Kennedy these days, the emphasis on the Senator in Mr. Roche's letter may also attract attention.

Edward Epstein, author of a book criticizing the official commission on the assassination headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, also has a letter in tomorrow's Literary Supplement. He takes exception to some comments by Mr. Sparrow about him.

First, Mr. Epstein objects to a statement that he worked with the longest-running explorer of the assassination, Mark Lane.

"This statement is completely false and without foundation," Mr. Epstein writes. "I never worked, cooperated or was associated with Mark Lane."

Mr. Sparrow, in a reply, says he accepts that disclaimer. His mistake, he says, was to rely on a published letter from Mr. Lane speaking of a "working relationship" with Mr. Epstein that lasted until ended by Mr. Epstein.

The other main rebuttal in Mr. Epstein's letter was against a charge by Mr. Sparrow that he had misquoted some of the Warren Commission's lawyers. The lawyers themselves had said as much when asked.

Mr. Epstein replies that he took notes and that the lawyers' memories, a year after they were interviewed, were just as likely to be faulty. He says one of the lawyers has withdrawn a claim that his only meeting with Mr. Epstein was for 10 minutes in a hotel lobby.