

KENNEDY PACKETS HELD IN CUSTOMS

Publisher Protests Delay of Items on Assassination

By CHARLES GRUTZNER

An American publisher complained yesterday that the Bureau of Customs was holding up 500 "educational packets" dealing with the assassination of President Kennedy.

He asserted that the bureau was "searching for a pretext" to delay local republication.

The packets arrived in New York on Monday from London. They contain photographs, transcripts, a copy of the anti-Kennedy "Wanted for Treason" poster circulated in Dallas, and other material including "unanswered questions" whose implications are critical of the Warren Commission report.

They were published in London by Jonathan Cape, Ltd., as an addition to the "Jackdaw" series, which includes packets on Joan of Arc, Manga Carta, the Battle of Trafalgar and more than 40 other subjects.

The Kennedy packet is to go on sale in England on March 23 for the equivalent of about \$2. The 8½-by-14-inch blue envelope in which the material is packaged has a large golden reproduction of the coat of arms of the President of the United States on its back.

The Dial Press, at 750 Third Avenue, which had ordered the copies from London, is arranging to publish and circulate the packet in this country, possibly with "some changes in editorial comment," according to Richard Baron, the publisher.

Official's Explanation

Michael Stramiello Jr., Regional Director of Customs, said yesterday that the packets had arrived by air freight on Monday at Kennedy International Airport. They were impounded by the customs officer at the airport.

"We sent notice to the importer that there was a ques-

tion of possible violation of some regulations," said Mr. Stramiello. "One question involved use of the Presidential seal. There was also a question about marking the country of origin on all printed matter."

"I don't know at the moment if there is or isn't a violation," he said. "We are looking into it. That's why we notified the importer. Such things happen every day."

Mr. Baron disputed Mr. Stramiello's explanation.

He said that the Presidential coat of arms, identical with that on the packet, was emblazoned in color on the cover of "Whitewash," Harold Weisberg's highly critical book on the Warren Report. "Whitewash" was published in 1965 by the Dell Publishing Company, of which the Dial Press is a partly owned subsidiary.

Imprint Cited

"No one questioned the legality of using the seal then," said Mr. Baron. As for the other question raised by the customs people, he said, the Jonathan Cape imprint with the London address is printed in large type on the front of each packet.

"We can only surmise from the customs agent's reaction," Mr. Baron said, "that the customs service seems to be searching for some pretext or excuse to detain this shipment."

Mr. Baron said an English literary agent had recently brought him three copies of the Kennedy packet and that Dell Press then decided it would either distribute the London packet here or publish a local version by arrangement with the Cape firm.

He said the 500 copies being held were not for sale here but were to be used for editorial discussion and as review copies.

Stephen Blair, attorney for Dial Press, said he believed that the customs officer at the airport had held up release of the shipment originally "because he was afraid it was a hot potato." He sent a letter yesterday to Irving Fishman, director of the Customs Bureau's imports compliance division, detailing the contents of the packets and asking for their immediate release.