THE COMMONWEAL

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

The Warren Report

SINCE THERE ARE very few surprises in the Report of the Warren Commission, there are bound to be few surprises in its public reception. Those who believed all along that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of John F. Kennedy now have detailed evidence to support that conviction. Those who have held that some kind of dark conspiracy was operating in Dallas can go on playing their ingenious games. There is nothing in the Report to rule out absolutely the possibility that secret, sinister forces were at work; the absence of supporting evidence is, presumably, of little consequence to the ideological skeptic. Those who have argued that there are important discrepancies in the testimony, unexplained coincidences, undiscovered witnesses and unexplored lines of inquiry will probably not be satisfied.

If one wants the whole truth, the truth about man's capacity for revolting crimes, the truth about how and why our political system can fertilize the ground for assassinations, the truth about every detail and implication of Oswald's act (and Ruby's), the truth about the collective psyche of the city of Dallas and its guardians of the law—if that is what one wants, then the Warren Report does not provide the truth. But if, with President Johnson, one asks of the Commission only that it "satisfy itself that the truth is known so far as it can be discovered," the Report is commendable. It is a good, finite document by responsible, finite men. As if to insure that there would be no doubts about their limitations, the Commission members managed to allow leaks to the press, imprudent observations by Chief Justice Warren, and freely circulating criticisms of the investigative procedures. These are not the marks of brilliance, just human nature carrying on in its accustomed way.

The report, let it be said, makes for drab reading. The trouble does not lie in the prose; one could not have expected a stylistic masterpiece from a solemn, undistinguished body. Nor does it lie in the absence of sensational new revelations. What is missing is what has been missing from the whole circle of facts and events surrounding the assassination. There was neither sense nor coherence in it. It stands out still as one of those gratuitous happenings of history which have no symmetry, no rational explanation, no discernible purpose. An existentialist might call it absurd, and he might be right.

HAD THE REPORT concluded that some glaring weakness had been uncovered in our civic life; or that the protection accorded a President is disastrously inadequate, inviting assassination; or that the nation is shot through with plots, then some glimmer of sense might have appeared. But the recommendations of the Commission point to nothing so drastic. They speak of the need for better coordination between the Secret Service and the F.B.I., of an improvement in Secret Service techniques (including a resort to that savior of us all, "the most efficient data-processing techniques"), of a more responsible press and other news media. These are good suggestions, but suspiciously like the usual kind of ideas which emerge when any group of intelligent men takes a close look at the byways of government procedures. No dramatist is going to fashion an epic out of this altogether pedestrian material.

In the end we are not left with much. The nation knows better what it knew all along—that a deranged man can do deranged things. The Commission's psychological exploration of the mind of Lee Harvey Oswald reads like a case history out of a self-help manual: he had a "deep-rooted resentment of all authority" and could not, praise be to the jargon of self-realization, "enter into meaningful relationships with people." The nation also knows that hatred combined with violence can lead to disastrous results. But if the people did not know

that before the assassination, they are not likely to know it much better now; anyway, men forget. The consistent thing about Original Sin, whether of the human or the political variety, is that it is so unimaginative, ever satisfied with repeating itself. President Kennedy tried to establish a new frontier. What he needed, but was not given, was a new humanity.

Mid-Campaign

WITH THE campaign about half over, the post-convention fears of what an all-out right-wing campaign based on simplistic ideas could do to the country have not been borne out. If the polls are anywhere near correct, the electorate has been a great deal more sophisticated in dealing with the Goldwater phenomenon than most analysts had told us to expect. Senator Goldwater has done his part. After five weeks, he has succeeded in developing only one major issue: Goldwaterism, and the uncertainties about it have taken hold in the most unlikely corners of the nation. The country *does* instinctively want in a President the balance, poise, restraint and grasp of facts that Goldwater so conspicuously lacks.

Goldwater has made every possible tactical mistake. The sweetness now being poured in vain over Republican moderates like Keating and Romney might have been productive if it had occurred to the Senator around convention time. The presence of William Miller on the ticket has neutralized the moral crusade against President Johnson. (*The Reporter* notes that Mr. Miller has been saying out loud and in public the things that Richard Nixon used to be alleged to have said to a rally of four people somewhere under a bush in the wilds of Montana.)

Goldwater remains addicted to needless hipshots that alienate whole blocs of voters at a time; the attack on social security that he has been trying to live down; the Marines-to-Guantanamo comment; the charge that President Kennedy timed the Cuban missile crisis for political purposes; the incredible suggestion that public welfare programs encourage crime.

For a man hailed so often as one who would not change his views to court election, Goldwater has been extraordinarily flexible. NATO, which he belittled, has become his fixed star; the Eisenhower foreign policy of which he was so contemptuous has become his model; since the campaign began, Goldwater has also switched his stand on the draft, tax-cuts, farm subsidies, extremists, TV debates, support for the United Nations, selling TVA, recognizing the Soviet Union and negotiating with Red China.

Through all this, President Johnson continues to let his opponent have as much rope as he wants, and the more the Senator speaks, the better the President looks. The President's decision not to debate with or even reply to Senator Goldwater was obvious enough, but seems to be paying off spectacularly; it is helping to make Goldwater seem even more brash and irrelevant than he really manages to be.

The problem for Johnson is to keep his camp from believing how bright the picture really is. The swing-over of Republican newspapers and Republican voters in suburbs and farm areas has been emphatic. The polls suggest that Goldwater is further down than any candidate has been at this stage since modern polling began in 1936. Goldwater has still not found an issue that the people are buying; only a major foreign disaster is likely to give him a chance to make up much ground quickly, and even then the tendency might be to rally around the incumbent instead. At this point, prospects are good that Goldwater will be beaten next month by as wide a margin as his improbable candidacy demands.

Peace, and the Price

THE RECENT settlement between the UAW and major auto companies reveals a paradox. While federal intervention of some sort in major labor disputes is more and more taken for granted, the device by which the federal government hopes to harmonize industrial settlements with the national interest, the wage and price guideposts of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, is of minimal value.

The wage-price guideposts are designed to promote steady economic growth without inflation. The aim of the wage guidepost is to keep prices stable by limiting wage increases to gains in productivity. But the measure of productivity gains to be used is not the gains in the particular industry where wage negotiations are being conducted, but the national productivity gains (estimated in recent years as 3.2 per cent annually). Therefore, although an individual industry may run ahead of the national trend in productivity and profits, e.g., the auto companies, a wage increase proportionately ahead of the national trend in that industry would be reflected in similar wage increases throughout the economy followed by price increases, and leading to inflation. So the Council of Economic Advisers reasons.