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| | ABSTRACT | |
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INFO.

FROM Chief of Station, London

SUBJECT Television Interview - Professor TREVOR-ROPER

ACTION REQUIRED - REFERENCES

1. We are enclosing herewith a tape recording of a BBC-2TV program "Encounter" which was shown on 14 January 1965 at 1930 hours. This thirty-minute program was devoted to interviewing Professor TREVOR-ROPER regarding his Sunday Times article criticizing the Warren Commission Report on the assassination of President Kennedy. The participants are identified on the tape; the moderator, who is not identified, is Erskine B. CHILDERS.
2. A duplicate copy of this tape was given to the ODENVY representative.

Eric T. DILLARD

Attachment: Tape

Distribution:
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CIA HISTORICAL REVISION PROGRAM
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BBC Television Interview - Professor Trevor-Roper - 14 January 1965

Erskine B. Childers, Moderator: Tonight's encounter is with Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, who is the regius professor of modern history at Oxford. Last September, the Warren Commission on the assassination of President Kennedy brought out its massive report with over twenty volumes of evidence. It found that Lee Harvey Oswald, and he alone, killed the President. A month ago, Professor Trevor-Roper published a sensational article in the Sunday Times dissenting from these findings. Now to talk to him are: Anthony Lewis, who covered the Warren Commission investigation for the New York Times and is now their London correspondent, and Louis Bland Cooper, criminologist, writer on legal affairs in the Observer, and lecturer at London University.

Professor Trevor-Roper, the killing of President Kennedy was followed by waves of rumor and speculation about who did it and whether there was a conspiracy, but the Warren Report seems to have satisfied virtually everyone. Now I think many people were astonished that you, as a scholar, have reopened the whole affair in this way. Why did you do it?

Professor Trevor-Roper: I did it because it didn't satisfy me. I agree that there was loud public acceptance of the Warren Report when it was published, and, indeed, some papers stated openly that by now all doubts were resolved and no problems remained.

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And this was the official reaction. But I must say, I find that in talking in America to ordinary, educated people, that scepticism is very wide.

Cooper: Professor, when did you first think that the Warren Commission's Report might not be as sound as most of us thought that it was in its findings that only Lee Harvey Oswald was the killer of President Kennedy?

T-R: When I read the Report.

Cooper: Yes, but at what state, I mean what particular fact lead you to begin to suspect its validity?

T-R: Well, I think the first thing that struck my mind when I read that Report was the problem of the killing of Tippett, which seemed to me handled in a very vague and indeed evasive manner.

Childers: This is the killing of the policeman, very soon after President Kennedy.

T-R: Yes. The whole chain of reasoning whereby the Warren Report seems to establish that Oswald had killed Tippett and that Oswald had been identified, in some way, as the possible assassin of the President, and that Tippett, we must presume, had approached him with that suspicion in his mind. All this

seemed to me very strange and unconvincing and a positive difficulty about the timing. How did he do it?

Lewis: Professor Trevor-Roper, that was one point you made in your article. You said, in essence, you rested your case on quoting a few central facts which render the whole Report suspect, the one you just mentioned is one of them. Then you suggested that the police notes, alleged police notes of the interrogation of Oswald had been destroyed, that the pathologist, the doctor, had been persuaded to adjust his evidence to the police view, the pathologist's notes had been destroyed, and that a bag in which the Commission found Oswald had carried the gun to his place of employment had been destroyed. Taking those particular points which you made, perhaps in reverse order, the point about the paper bag you've now withdrawn. I think you said you'd eat humble pie on that because you asserted that the bag had been destroyed when, in fact, it hadn't been destroyed. Indeed, a picture of it was printed in the Report. It was referred to frequently, and I must say I wonder how could anyone doing a scholarly piece of work, which you said you were doing, have made such a mistake.

Prof. T-R: Well, we all make mistakes, and I admitted that mistake. That bag was destroyed as evidence in the sense that it was discolored beyond recognition by chemical tests to which

it was subjected, and, therefore, the FBI judged that it was no longer valid evidence and made another bag and submitted the other bag ?? . Now, I made a mistake in reading the evidence and I was writing under a certain pressure of time and I noticed that mistake afterwards. I noticed it before it was pointed out because, as you say, the original bag, discolored though it was, remained an exhibit, and as soon as that was brought to my attention, I withdrew. I'm not going to defend myself on grounds where I think I was wrong. I made a mistake.

Lewis: No, well of course it is understandable, anyone can make a mistake. But it is a rather serious charge, at least I think it would ordinarily be considered serious to charge the authorities in any country with deliberately destroying evidence and I shouldn't think that one would do that lightly. Say that lightly.

T-R: I was not making any charges. I was stating what I believed to be facts. One of the facts, which I stated, was erroneous in that particular, and as soon as it was brought to my attention, I withdrew it.

Cooper: Can I take up another point, Professor, with you? And that's with regard to the pathologist's notes. Now you said, in your first article in the Sunday Times, that Dr. Hughes, who was the chief pathologist conducting the autopsy, had burned all his original notes. Do you stand by that statement today?

T-R: Burned his original notes?

Cooper: All his original notes, were your words, Professor.

T-R: All -- I think are his words too.

Cooper: No, they're not, Professor, because, in fact, when he gave evidence, he said all he had done was a first preliminary draft. Can I perhaps remind you what, in fact, took place was that Dr. Hughes had, in fact, taken his notes at the autopsy, they were preserved, and they were given to the Commission. All he had done was, when he had gone home to draft his report, he did a first draft, no doubt as you would do if you were writing an article for Sunday Times again, he didn't like it very much and he threw that in the fire when he had done his second draft report. That's what was burned.

T-R: I was quoting his actual affidavit.

Cooper: Well now, even his actual affidavit didn't say that.

T-R: What does it say?

Cooper: The original affidavit said that the chief pathologist at the - well, this is in fact what you say, that the..

T-R: No, I want to know what the actual affidavit said.

Cooper: The actual affidavit said that he had burnt his notes

T-R: Just a minute, it doesn't say "he," it says "I."

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Childers: Well, gentlemen, can I suggest, really what we're getting at here is your fundamental question, I think, Professor Trevor-Roper -- whether there is evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald took a gun into the book depository building, behind the President's car as it was travelling, and whether he fired it. The pathologist's evidence concerned whether there was a bullet wound in the front of the neck, going into the front or the back, and so on. Now, do you still claim that there is no evidence that Oswald took the gun in and fired it?

T-R: There is no valid evidence that Oswald took the gun in. The question of whether he fired it is a different matter and the evidence is of a slightly different character.

What do you mean by that?

Childers: Tony Lewis.

Lewis: Yes, I would ask the same question. You said there is no valid evidence. I should just like to run down a bit of the evidence which the Commission had which seems to me to be extraordinarily more detailed than would be produced in the ordinary criminal trial. I don't know whether you've read many reports of criminal trials. But just let me run down a few things that they had.

T-R: Now what you must run down is the evidence that he brought the bag containing the gun into the book depository.

Lewis: Yes, but you know the way things work in life, Professor Trevor Roper, if I may say so, is that ordinarily in the case of murders, you don't have six witnesses standing around watching the killing.

T-R: No.

Lewis: Circumstantial evidence is necessarily relied on, and that's what exists in most cases and exists in great detail in this case. So, if you'll forgive me, I'll tell you what I think is relevant to the facts. Number 1, the ownership of the gun by Oswald was established beyond any doubt. The place where he kept it was established, the fact that it was not there immediately after the killing was established, and that the shape of the gun was still shown on the blankets where it had been kept. The fact that he made a bag, a paper bag, out of materials available at the place where he worked was fairly well shown. That he carried a bag -

T-R: Now, now, may I interrupt? You are talking about "fairly well." I believe that in a matter as delicate as this it's important to know what is certain and what is not certain. Half

my complaints against the Warren Report is that adverbs like "fairly," "Probably," "Perhaps," etc. are used to slide over a great number of difficulties.

Cooper: This is to exclude circumstantial evidence, because circumstantial evidence can never be certainty, of course.

T-R: Yes, but in the absolutely essential links, I think it is important to state what is circumstantial evidence and what is not.

Lewis: Now let me proceed and you can decide whether it is circumstantial or not.

T-R: May I interrupt you?

Lewis: Yes, sir.

T-R: You are presently on a particular point, that is to say, the carrying of the gun in. You'll remember that in my article I never stated that it was, that Oswald did not carry the gun in, and my case does not rest on any such suggestion. I said he may have carried it in and he may have fired it. My statement is not a denial that he carried it in. My statement was to point out that the evidence that he carried it in is not valid, and my charge against the Report is not on this issue at all, it is that the procedure of the Commission in building up this Report has been lax throughout.

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Lewis: Perhaps I misunderstood, I thought you were judging, as I read the piece that you wrote, I thought you were judging the Report as a report. You made some statements that were quite categorical. One of which was, as I recall, just to move on, I haven't gone on with all the evidence there was, of persons seeing Oswald with the gun in his hand, fingerprints on the gun, on the bag, on boxes around - pretty complete evidence by the ordinary standard. But you made, for example, a categorical statement that the police must have taken notes of their interrogation of Oswald.

T-R: Now, what are you asking me about?

Lewis: Well, let me finish my question, perhaps, and that the notes were destroyed. That's again a rather serious charge. Do you stand by that charge?

T-R: I stand by my statement that I'm astonished that in these circumstances no notes were kept and one explanation, the one which I accepted was that they were destroyed. If you tell me there's another explanation, there's another explanation.

Cooper: When you say notes, Professor, do you mean notes taken actually at the moment when Oswald was being interrogated, or notes made subsequent to the interrogation?

T-R: I mean record of what he said.

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Cooper: Well that's here - that's all in an appendix in the Report - there are pages of it.

T-R: No, but not in any form that could be used in an ordinary, at least not in an English court of law.

Cooper: Well, do you think that it's normal police practice for policemen to actually record notes as the accused personal suspect is making his statement?

T-R: If I'm run in for ?? and the police say to me that anything I say may be used in evidence against me, he writes down what I say.

Cooper: But, Professor, there are circumstances where the policeman can merely give oral evidence of what you said to him. He doesn't need to write it down, does he?

T-R: I should hope that the assassination of the President of the United States is a case sufficiently important for careful details.

Cooper: Of course, at that moment they were simply taking him in as the killer of Tippet, not as the killer of the President, weren't they?

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Childers: Mr. Trevor-Roper, can I bring this to a wider level now, because in a sense you've already said that you were not suggesting that there was definitely a conspiracy of some kind. For example, a conspiracy in, shall we say, destroying notes that the police, you feel, should have taken, or might have taken. But you've also criticized the very character of the Warren Commission itself. You said, I believe, that you joined the Who Killed Kennedy Committee here in Britain originally because you were convinced that the composition of the Commission and the procedure which it announced were ill-calculated to produce the truth or guarantee a full examination of the evidence. Now, what was it, really, about the Commission that you were unhappy about?

T-R: Well, the Commission consisted of busy men, mainly politicians in an election year, and it seemed to me that it was insufficiently independent of the sources of its material. That is to say, one sees the Commission as a tribunal before whom the police or the FBI are making a case, which is essentially a prosecutor's case. It is essential that the tribunal stands apart from the police, from the FBI, receives the police and FBI evidence, is able to look at it quite objectively with the aid of other evidence such as might be brought by a defense counsel in an ordinary trial. And it seemed to me that this was not so. That if one looks at the way the Commission worked, one finds that it was set up at a time when, on the evidence,

the FBI had already perfected its case. And, Mr. Hoover, the head of the FBI, being interrogated by the Commission in February, stated that he had reached his conclusions, they were final, that anyone who dissented was a lunatic, and he then presented a mass of material which lead to that conclusion, which did not include certain material which we know exists, which, perhaps, didn't lead to that conclusion. And I think that given the weakness of the Commission, it was very difficult, psychologically, for them, in a very short time, to break down this pyramid of prearranged material which lead to a particular conclusion. They dotted the i's and they crossed the t's and their whole method of examination (and I read all through the twenty-six volumes of evidence) their whole method of examination seems to me lax. They just recorded what people said, the cross-examination is not the kind of cross-examination which would have taken place in a judicial inquiry.

Childers: Louis Bland Cooper.

Cooper: Well, I think most English people, Professor, would agree with a great deal of what you say, that in fact this Commission of inquiry didn't conduct it according to standards that we would think proper. There was also a cut and thrust of debate, you know, of a defense counsel cross-examining witnesses, and I think in reading the Report you would have felt this. But at the same time, isn't this traditional in America, that the commissions of inquiry there are not quite conducted on the

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same basis, they are fact-finding.

T-R: Um-huh, and what is the result? You get a commission of inquiry like the commission of inquiry on Pearl Harbor, which is now recognized, I think, by historians, to be incorrect.

Childers: Anthony Lewis, you actually covered the day-to-day workings of this Commission.

A.L: I just wonder, I'm bound to observe, I wonder how someone, how you would feel, Professor Trevor-Roper, if I made a general statement, the kind you just made, tarring all royal commissions because of something one commission did twenty-five years ago. I must say, that was just a bit too much. Now, getting on to this subject, I would never be an apologist for the methods the Warren Commission used. I think it made mistakes as to its procedure, but your suggestion that it was not sufficiently independent and too closely tied and committed to an FBI view seems to me to display an appalling ignorance of the American system and the FBI and its relationship with this Commission. One thing, you said the FBI had already established its case when the Commission was founded. The Commission was appointed on November 30, eight days after the assassination, at a time when nothing had been resolved, no evidence of any significance was confirmed -

T-R: I'm sorry, I should have said in February when the Commission started its meetings. Started its work.

Lewis: Secondly, I think it would be very hard, very hard, to find among the 180 million people in the United States, any figure who was more independent of the FBI, who was less popular with the head of the FBI, than the Chief Justice of the United States, Mr. Earl Warren. I just think that is a, frankly, an almost laughable a ?proposition? . After the Report came out, Mr. Hoover, who cares more than anything about the FBI, was highly critical of the report, and of the Commission, of leaked information to the press, and the suggestion that they're working hand in glove is difficult -

T-R: On what point was he critical? He was critical on one point only, and that was the one point on which the Commission happened to cast a passing breath of dissent on the FBI.

Cooper: Professor, what relevance is J. Edgar Hoover's evidence in this? He wasn't at Dallas, he didn't see any of the shooting, none of his evidence was directed to the facts of the assassination of President Kennedy. There is simply opinion evidence by J. Edgar Hoover, I would have thought that this Commission, even supposing it weren't the best, could have assessed what is factual evidence and what is opinion evidence. Don't you agree?

T-R: Why then, I might ask, did the Commission summon to give evidence, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, whose opinion, you say, is not worth having?

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Cooper: No, I didn't say his opinion wasn't worth having, I said it was opinion evidence. It's valuable for what it's worth, but it is not factual.

T-R: Why didn't they summon the head of the FBI in Dallas?

Cooper: Well, I don't know the answer to that, perhaps you don't know the answer either.

T-R: I don't. I'm not claiming to know anything, I'm merely claiming that I have no alternative theory about the murder of Kennedy. I am claiming that the procedure of the Commission does not lead to the results which are stated in the Report.

Childers: But Professor, when you say that you feel that the Commission was committed by some choice to take ?largely? FBI or police sources, do you yourself have specific witnesses in mind, for example, specific evidence that they didn't hear, that you feel is absolutely vital?

T-R: Yes, I mentioned one. The head of the FBI in Dallas.

Childers: You feel he knows something, or you know he knows something?

T-R: Well, I'll make a positive statement. In the search of the 6th floor of the book depository, there was found a bag. This bag contained some chicken bones, and the head of the FBI,

local FBI, was quoted by the New York Times, your paper, as saying, a respectable paper, as saying ...

Lewis: Thank you.

T-R: explicitly that the FBI had detected the fingerprints of Oswald on this bag and that this bag was the lunch of the assassin. Thereupon, a black man called Bonnie Ray Williams appeared and said, as a matter of fact, "That is my lunch bag" and the fingerprints miraculously disappeared. Now, the Commission states that the head of the FBI, local FBI, denied having said this. But why did they not fall on him, to whom did he deny it? If this raises a legitimate doubt in the mind of the reader, surely it should be allayed, surely it is the duty of the Commission to summon this man, Mr. Gordon Jankin and question him whether he did or did not say that. Perhaps it was their duty to summon the correspondent of your paper to say why did he report it thus if it was untrue. Inevitably, an element of suspicion is left in the mind when a witness of that nature is not summoned.

Childers: Anthony Lewis.

Lewis: Well, without wanting to criticize my own newspaper, or American newspapers generally, I will say that many of the things that were said in Dallas by the newspapers, in the turmoil that followed that very terrible event, simply don't stand up.

T-R: Many of the things in the Warren Report don't stand up either, but this isn't a reason for not pressing.

Lewis: Well, I must say that we've tried to get out what the things are that don't stand up. It seems to me you haven't mentioned any yet, Professor Trevor-Roper, what doesn't stand up? For example, the paper bag, the notes of the pathologist. Let me take one other specific if I may. You made the statement, again, a rather serious one ...

Childers: Just a second...I'm sorry, let Professor Trevor-Roper answer that.

Lewis: Yes, certainly.

T-R: Let me take the case of the murder of Tippett. This seems to me a very important episode which is involved in deepest mystery and yet is passed over by the Commission as if it had been established with perfect clarity. The position is that, according to the Commission, Tippett accosted Oswald and, after some conversation, Oswald shot Tippett. And this episode is essential because, whatever its cause, it led to the arrest of Oswald. Now, on what evidence, I ask, and I think any reasonable person may ask, on what evidence did Tippett think that Oswald was a suitable person to accost as a suspect of the assassination, for that is what we are ???

Now, all that the Commission can state is that a very general

description was sent out saying that the suspect is believed to be a white man, aged about 30, about 5'10" in height, and about 160 pounds in weight. Now that is so vague a description that it applies to a very great number of people in Dallas and yet, Oswald was the only person, as far as we know, who actually fell under suspicion. Furthermore, this description, vague though it is, for the purposes of a particular arrest, is remarkable precise in relation to what may have been seen by a man standing on the ground six floors below through a window. And yet, the only piece of evidence which has been given which can relate the shooting to the advice sent out to the police, and among them to Tippet, is a statement by a man called Brennen who saw, said he saw, Oswald from the ground floor.

Childers: Louis Bland Cooper.

Cooper: Professor, is that really quite fair? You see, after all, Tippet is dead and we don't know how Tippet reacted, either to the messages that came over the radio, or to the sight of Oswald. He may have had the faintest suspicion that Oswald might have been the man that they were looking for. We don't know what happened.

T-R: Now, you're talking about "may" and "might."

Cooper: Oh well this is, I mean, the Commission is in the same position as we are now.

T-R: No, no, no, they were in a much better position than we

are. They needn't have talked about "may" and "might," there were several witnesses to the Tippett episode who have not been called.

Cooper: Nobody knows what made Tippett react. This we don't know. Never can know.

T-R: If the Commission had taken the trouble to call other witnesses who were available, it may be that they would have discovered.

?: Why should they rely on the car, Professor, it couldn't have been seen.

T-R: He was sitting in the car, according to one witness who has contradicted herself again and again and who is the only witness on whom the Commission has chosen to rely when there are other witnesses available.

?Well, I think that (garbled - all talking together)

T-R: This is much too important a point to push aside.

?No, I'm not pushing it aside.

Lewis: Wouldn't you say it is just not true they didn't rely on that witness. They quoted half a dozen witnesses to the affair between Oswald and Tippett, and as Lewis says, there'll never be any certainty about what was in Tippett's mind because he's dead.

T-R: There'll never be any certainty about what was in his mind but there are other people who were witnesses to episodes in that sequence of events who have not been summoned.

Childers: Mr. Roper, can I take it beyond this detail which obviously we can't resolve here. You also challenged, in fact you said above all there is the question of Lee Harvey Oswald's motive. Why should he have done this? What did you really mean by that?

T-R: I mean that the Commission, having come to the conclusion that Oswald, and Oswald alone, without external motivation, shot the President, and being therefore unable to provide a rational explanation of why he did it, has appealed to a psychological explanation. The Commission has said, "We must look for the sources of Oswald's action in Oswald's psychological case history." Very well, let us accept that basis. Now if Oswald was either, on the one hand, a perverted idealist, or, on the other hand, a mere exhibitionist, and shot the President for one of those reasons, or both, the psychological reaction when he was arrested would be to boast of it. As an idealist he would say, "I did the act of justice." As an exhibitionist, he would say, "It was I who did it."

Cooper: ?? I read this report and one of the things that struck me immensely was here was a man who was at odds with his wife, they'd been separated, he goes home the

night before, he tries to strike up a conversation with her, she will have nothing to do with him and he goes off the next morning, he goes to the garage, picks up this rifle, and he says, "I will show her that I am a man" and goes out to do the brave act. Now isn't this psychologically acceptable theory?

Childers: Anthony Lewis.

T-R: But then he doesn't show it because when he arrested he says, "I didn't do it, I don't know what you're talking about."

Cooper: This is a game--the man who wants to go on trial and wants to be able to brave it out and fight the authorities and collect all the publicity..

T-R: In that case, he miscalculated, but on your own reasoning, if he did it in order to draw attention to himself, he singularly failed to draw attention to himself.

Cooper: No, he didn't.

Childers: Anthony, Lewis, a very brief word from you on Oswald.

Lewis: Well, I was really going to turn a little bit to say that, Professor Trevor-Roper, you said at the end of your article that you thought the acceptance of the Report was emotional not rational. Some might feel that your article was the same. I wonder whether you really are not basing your whole approach on a premise that

American society is sick, that there's something wrong with it, suggestions that you made.

T-R: I do not believe that American society is sick, I regard it as a perfectly rational society, I don't know why you should say this. I regard the Report as a document which does not stand up on the evidence which is available in those twenty-six volumes.

Childers: Well finally, Professor, after all this controversy, and what we've just been saying, I think, are you going to continue to challenge the Warren Report?

T-R: I'm not going to go on repeating myself. I shall go on, naturally, I shall watch it. As a matter of fact, even since I published my article, an American lawyer, a lawyer actually employed by the Warren Commission, has published an article in the American Bar Association Journal stating that on the evidence produced by the Warren Commission, no court of law could find Oswald guilty.

Childers: You're going to continue then what you hope to see - new witnesses brought forward?

T-R: I shall continue to observe what happens, I think that witnesses' memories will fade, a great deal of testimony is lost, witnesses' memories are even more deceptive than politician's memoirs, and, on the other hand, there may be further revelations.

I think that we haven't heard the last and that the suggestion that the Warren Commission resolves all doubts and leaves no problems, I think, is totally untrue.

Childers: You feel then, for example, that there are still.....

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