

# Oswald Interview in Moscow Recalled

Nov 25, 1963

## Bitterness Detected in Long Talk

What kind of man was Lee Harvey Oswald?

Did this admitted Marxist ever indicate he might be capable of shooting the President of the United States, as Dallas police say he assassinated John F. Kennedy last Friday — just two days before he was simultaneously shot and killed as the case took on a bizarre twist.

Few people really seem to have known the 24-year-old New Orleans native well. Most describe him as a quiet sort of a person, one who did not mix well — a loner. He gave few opportunities to really understand him.

But in a rare moment of garrulousness he gave one American such a chance. She is Miss Priscilla Johnson, and at the time she was halfway through a two-year stint in Moscow as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance.

### Interview in Moscow

The time was early November, 1959. The place — the Hotel Metropole, the city's principal hotel for foreigners.

Oswald had arrived in the Soviet Union on Oct. 30 that year with the announced intention of seeking Soviet citizenship.

Ten days later Miss Johnson, now doing research at Harvard for a book, learned he was staying at the hotel and asked if he would give her an interview. He said he would, and they talked quite freely for seven hours.

The impression of Oswald that emerges from that meeting is one of a young man intensely bitter at the United States, who displayed absolute single-mindedness about whatever he was attempting to do — at that moment trying to obtain Soviet citizenship.

Is this the sort of man who might have assassinated the President?

### Single-Minded Drive

"It struck me," Miss Johnson said in an interview this week-end, "that probably when he

left the Soviet Union . . . he put the same single-mindedness in leaving whatever he needed to learn for this act (the assassination).

"He saved every penny he earned in the Marines for the trip to Russia," she said, "and he wanted an early discharge so he could get there a little faster. Within two days of his discharge, he was on a boat for the Soviet Union.

"I just think this is the kind of person that might . . . he would have gone about it in a methodical way. He would have learned whatever he needed to know."

### Reports Detailed

This description dovetails with the FBI report that back on March 29 of this year Oswald, using an assumed name, ordered from a mail-order firm the rifle with which President Kennedy was shot during a motorcycle in Dallas.

He was bitter, Miss Johnson said, against "capitalism" and "worker exploitation" in the United States — classic Communist as well as Marxist phrases.

But he never expressed any hatred of the presidency or of John F. Kennedy, then a young Massachusetts Senator. "He didn't speak about politics in a personal way."

### Capability Indicated

During their long conversation, she said, he indicated he favored using murder as a political weapon.

"But from our conversation, I could see that he was a man capable of a whole lot" because of his raw bitterness, she said.

"My mother," he told her, "has been a worker for her whole life. She had to produce profit for the capitalists, and is a good example of what happens to workers in the United States."

"But," she added, "he wouldn't say what work she did."

Neither did this expert

workman reveal a fondness for guns.

"He was, she recalls, "a very plausible young man at first blush. He was very conservatively dressed. He talked extremely quietly, and I rather liked him, and it was because this conversation went on for so many hours that I gave him better he was . . . I saw him completely proven wrong about Marxism, which he claimed to be acting in the name of."

### Hated Defected

"As he talked, you know, I got the idea that he didn't know Marxism at all well," although he claimed "he'd been studying it since 15.

"And it's because I knew Marxism so poorly that I knew it must have been hatred of the United States, rather than a real understanding of what he was doing" that motivated him to renounce his American citizenship and attempt to become a Soviet citizen.

"Also," she said, "he taught himself to read and write Russian from Berlitz (School of Languages), but he said he had a lot of trouble speaking it, and he seemed to be quite helpless.

"He sat in his hotel room, and his mother would telephone from Fort Worth and beg him not to defect, and he just wouldn't answer the phone.

### A Trip for Ice Cream

"He wouldn't go out at all into Moscow. And he told me that the one expedition he had made had been to a children's store only one block away, and he recalled that he'd managed to get there by himself and buy himself an ice cream in the crowds."

At this point he had been in the Soviet Union about 10 days.

"He didn't know Russia, and he wasn't very curious about the place," she said, "even though he was defecting to it."

Fidel Castro had been in power in Cuba for almost a

year when they talked, and people generally were beginning to suspect at about that time that the Cuban leader was a Communist.

### No Mention of Cuba

Yet never once during the seven-hour interview did Oswald mention Cuba or Castro, though he later became chairman of a Dallas branch of Fair Play for Cuba, a left-wing, pro-Castro group.

After talking a good deal about Marxist philosophy as he understood it, he said at one point: "I have had practical experience in the world. I am not an idealist completely.

I have had a chance to watch military imperialism in action," Miss Johnson recalled.

He also told her that "he had seen tremendous poverty in the United States, and he had been shocked by the plight of the Negro."

But again and again he returned to theoretical Marxism: "He said he'd become a Marxist at 15," Miss Johnson recalled.

### Bid to Escape

"After five years of reading socialist literature," he told her, "observing treatment of minority groups (Communists, Negroes, and workers especially) watching the treatment of workers in New York and seeing how they're exploited—I'd read about it in socialist literature and thought the description was quite correct."

He indicated he wanted Soviet citizenship primarily to escape the United States society he viewed in such a light.

"Since I'd either be a worker exploited for capitalist profit (in the United States) or else an exploiter," he had said, "I [have been] one of the unemployed" rather than assume either role.

At the time "he was terribly bitter against the American Embassy," she said, "because they would not allow him to take the oath renouncing his citizenship.

"They would not accept his passport until the Soviet Government confirmed the grant-

## Call for Control Of Firearms Groups

By the Associated Press

Somerville, Mass.

The Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association said Sunday the assassination of President Kennedy accents a need for federal legislation to control interstate sale of firearms.

Chief Thomas J. O'Brien of Somerville, chairman of the association's legislative committee, asked Rep. Thomas O'Neill Jr. (D) of Massachusetts to introduce remedial legislation. Mr. O'Neill's 8th District includes the city of Somerville.

"The present weaknesses in our laws that permits criminals and irresponsible individuals to obtain firearms from without their state of residence in order to circumvent the laws of that state . . . must be remedied," Mr. O'Brien told Mr. O'Neill.

The police chief's key proposal would "prohibit the sale, rental, or lease of a firearm by dealers within the various states to nonresidents of that state who have not complied with all the laws, rules, and regulations of their state of residence pertaining to the acquiring of a firearm."

"The proposals would apply also to interstate transportation of weapons.

ing to him of Soviet citizenship, and the Soviet Government didn't. He was worried when I talked with him."

Their talk was deep and cordial. She found him troubled, plausible, and unknowingly emotional.

"She never saw him again."

He told her "once the Russians accepted him he would give me his (full) story . . . He promised to come and talk with me before he jumped the hotel and went to live as a Russian.

"About two days later I went down to the floor where he lived and asked for him, and they just threw up their hands and said, 'He's gone.' He vanished without a trace."