

25 December 1968

Dear Menahem,

The ten days since you left the USA have been quite eventful. Man has truly left his planet for the first time since the species appeared on earth. Three humans in a tiny fragile shell traveled into the great void and went close to the surface of the moon, on which men soon will land. They radioed back a steady stream of banalities, alternating with saccharine religiosity and readings from the bible, prayers, and wishes for a merry christmas--so painful to hear as almost to obliterate the pathos and courage of the journey, the awesome danger and grandeur of man's first rendezvous with an extra-terrestrial body. I suppose when the Russians in their turn rocket into the fearsome corridors of space toward the lifeless desolation of the moon they in turn will demean the cosmic voyage by political and cultural chauvinism, chanting propaganda for Lenin as the Americans did for Santa Claus, and proving once again how far the human mind and spirit lags behind the human technology.

If it was not enough that men went to the moon, the television crews also had the opportunity to cover, for their bug-eyed audience, the return of the men of the Pueblo, and to intrude into their reunion with wives and children and parents, in one gala spectacle. When the story broke a few days ago of their release, it was reported in such tangential and obfuscatory terms by the radio/TV newsmen that one's suspicion had to boil immediately. It was impossible to know from the reportage that the USA had signed a "solemn apology," however much it was covered up by prior and subsequent disclaimers. Some of the pundits turned the whole farce into a tribute to the Johnson administration's "humanitarianism" but others, to give credit where it is due, assailed the official doubletalk, falsehoods, and hypocrisy with all the scorn and sarcasm it deserved. And if proof was needed of the quintessential hypocrisy, there was the concomitant breakdown of the negotiations with the Viet-Cong on their offer to release three American prisoners--because of the unwillingness of the Americans to give the Viet-Cong a propaganda victory.

The captain of the Pueblo no sooner crossed the bridge into American-held territory in South Korea than he began the most vicious and unbelievable denunciations of the North Koreans, claiming that they were totally devoid of humanity, that they had brutally beaten the crew and that many still showed evidence of the beatings, black eyes and other injuries, that he himself had been kept in solitary confinement. They arrived at San Diego, at the naval air base, to music by the navy band and speeches by the robot Reagan, emotional for once (he comes to life when he hears of "communist atrocities") and other local dignitaries. The captain, Bucher, made a speech in turn, during which he was blatantly interrupted time and again by the naval high-up at his side, who whispered instructions into his ears before the eyes of the whole world.

Later there was a press conference, not with the captain but with the chief executive officer. The admiral in charge forbade reporters from asking any questions about the capture of the Pueblo or about the captivity--leaving them no questions to ask at all. Although Captain Bucher had already told the world repeatedly of the savage and inhumane treatment he and the men had endured, questions were ruled out on the ground that the matter was, so to speak, sub judice, the executive officer and the others were to have a naval trial or hearing and should not reply lest they jeopardize their own future. Nevertheless, after insistence by the reporters, the exec was allowed to answer questions about the routine and the living conditions during captivity. Then it turned out that the Captain's "solitary confinement" consisted of his (and the other officers) being billeted in private rooms, and allowed to be with each other and the crew only some four times each day, for a total of several hours. The exec said further that the private rooms were well-furnished, almost lavish judging by his description, in fact; that there was no attempt to brain-wash them, although they were supplied with reading material which they could read if they wished, of an informational and factual nature.



From the exec's description--and he even ventured so far as to suggest that there were some fine and wonderful people among the North Vietnamese--it appears that the Pueblo's men were treated with exceptional courtesy and generosity. Not one of the men, seen as they emerged from the planes at San Diego, sported a visible black eye or any other sign of frailty, mistreatment, or injury. Nor is any mention being made of Bucher's signed confessions and broadcast confessions while in North Korea that the Pueblo had indeed violated the territorial waters. You may be sure that when the American government and press has finished with this affair, the truth will be buried as deeply as the truth about Dallas was buried by the Warren Commission.

Which brings me to my next subject. L'Affair Garrison has become so chaotic, thanks to Salandria and Weisberg, that I scarcely know how to bring you up to date. Some weeks ago I got an urgent request from Weisberg for copies of letters I had once received from a man named Jules Striso, a crackpot or provocateur of about the time of "Rita." I sent the letters, which Weisberg showed to and discussed with Salandria while they were en route to New Orleans, about two or three weeks ago. When Salandria returned, he sent me a note thanking me for making the letters available and saying that Striso was a government agent. This time, I did reply, asking, "So what else is new?" I reminded Vince that he had made similar charges against Epstein, Thompson, Jacob Cohen, Gurvich, and still others, and hinted that his new revelation produced no trembling in me but only a vast ennui. Meanwhile, I received two lengthy phonecalls from one of Salandria's "cabinet," Gary Schoener. From him I learned that Salandria had also accused as "government agents" Bill Turner, Bill Boxley, and Stephen Jaffe! To appreciate how ludicrous and insane the situation is, one has to realize that Jaffe is one of the arch-Garrisonites, a green silly student who has propagandized without limit for Garrison in the various underground papers, as Bill Turner has done in Ramparts. As for Boxley, he is an acknowledged ex-CIA agent who has been working for Garrison for about a year. Thanks to Salandria's agitation, Boxley was fired summarily and denounced in the press by Garrison personally as a government agent.

While all this is going on, David Lifton receives a two-sentence letter from Salandria, demanding an explanation of his (Lifton's) "strange behavior" while Salandria was in New Orleans! Poor Lifton, utterly mystified, replied that he did not even know that Salandria was in New Orleans or what in the world he was talking about. Well, it turns out that while in New Orleans Vince got (typographical error, how apt) Vince got a phonecall from someone. He thought he recognized the voice as Lifton's and proceeded on that assumption. Actually it was Ed Horsey who called--the utter liar whose malicious falsehoods I recently uncovered. He had convinced a woman in St. Petersburg, with whom I correspond, that Kerry Thornley was behind a series of harrassments she was experiencing. She was so unnerved by these incidents that she called me one night recently. I told her that I was far more suspicious of Horsey than anyone else and that I would check on a story he had told her involving a letter to Tink Thompson. I discovered on checking with Tink that the story was utterly false. This convinced my friend in St. Petersburg that Horsey, not Thornley, was the author of her harrassments; and sure enough, when Horsey left St. P., the incidents ceased entirely.

While all this was going on, I got a call from Thompson, saying that he was now completely disgusted with Salandria, whom he had continued to court from time to time despite the slanders and accusations. In a conversation with Vince a few days ago, Vince would not say in so many words that he still regarded Tink as a government agent but did say, "Let me put it this way: you have not passed our security clearance, Tink." That was finally too much for Tink, and he is now "through" with Vince. As for Bill Turner--he is so indignant and infuriated with the grotesque charges that he promises to punch Vince in the nose the next time he sees him. Vince has been phoning The Beloved Assassination Hostess and Ray Marcus the Oracle to warn them against Turner--it is not yet certain how they responded.



Well, I suppose I should just sit back and laugh my head off at the disarray in the Garrison camp. It is really comical, or would be, were there not some serious aspects--the fate of Clay Shaw, whose trial is now set for the 21st of January, to mention one.

Nothing that Vince does should really surprise anyone, at this late date, but I must admit that his originality and audacity in the latest of his designations of government agents is rather breathtaking. It is more than a menstrual cycle--perhaps (dare we hope?) a last grand menopausal stand.

I have taken care of all the correspondence, both the material you brought the Sunday before you left and the material delivered here the next Friday. Some I mailed already, the rest will be mailed on the 30th. The books are another story, however: they were delivered to the wrong apartment and remained there for three days. Then I moved them into my bedroom, where they are standing around for lack of storage space. I would not like to have the cartons as permanent decor so I am hoping that orders for the book will come thick and fast. If they do not, I hope you will think of some other way of storing or disposing of the books.

I had a talk with Ruth just before she became ill with the flu and had no idea that she was sick until she phoned the next week, when the worst of it was over. I felt really terrible that she should have been alone in the empty house and so sick but I suppose that if I had known, I should not have been able to do a thing, as we were working urgently up to the 24th on the General Assembly, which had to continue beyond the target for adjournment. It was only yesterday that I cleaned up the last of the reports and cables for our HQs. I have invited Ruth to dinner tomorrow night and am looking forward to seeing her.

Although you have confided in me to a large extent, I am not going to comment on your private situation just now, except to say that I will be very disappointed and dismayed if you do not pull back from the brink and devote yourself to undoing any harm done to your family life by the events of the last six months. It is no secret to you that I have great affection and respect for Ruth, in whom I do find unusual warmth, ~~warmth~~ generosity, and goodness. During our friendship, I have almost always been frank and even blunt, until recent months. I have necessarily been somewhat reticent, knowing that one must tread on eggshells when near the eye of a hurricane. But this much I must say: Do not be tempted back to the edge of the chasm, lest you take an irreversible step which will stamp the rest of your life with guilt and unhappiness. I say this out of the friendship that I have felt for you, as I think you know. I look forward to hearing from you, about your journey and your arrival. With love to Varda, Seth, and you,

Sincerely,



30 December 1968

P.S. After writing the enclosed long letter, I heard from Ruth about your phonecall suggesting that it was not too late to reverse the process of relocation and that you might return and resume publication of TMO. I was incredulous, to put it as mildly as possible. It was a matter for enough grief that TMO had to end, despite the sacrifices made by you and also by others who made substantial contributions in the hope that TMO could continue. That grief and sense of loss would be far greater if TMO ended when it did not have to end; and however much your friends and supporters might offer understanding and sympathy, I wonder if you would ever be able to forgive yourself.

I hardly know what to think. As I understand it, you and Ruth have now agreed to proceed with your original plans to resettle in Israel. Perhaps your idea of returning was only a momentary impulse, a transitory doubt. When I remember the passion of your cry that you could not live without Israel, after your first visit there this year, I am at a loss to understand why you should have ~~thought~~ after 24 hours of returning here. I can only hope that by the time you receive this, you will have resolved your inner doubts and taken a firm direction towards your future in Israel.

Maxwell Geismar has written to me, upon receiving back his ms. He seems deeply affected by the compound loss, of his admired and valued friend Arnoni and of TMO. And I feel sure that his feeling is quite sincere, since you have given him a needed example of strength and principle. Apparently he has been discussing things with Paul Sweezy, and writes that the latter was also extremely regretful about TMO. Sweezy has suggested to Maxwell that he would like to fill out the unexpired TMO subscriptions with Monthly Review. I replied to Maxwell that I simply had no idea how that offer would strike you and that he and/or Sweezy should write to you direct, and I gave him the address I have used myself, c/o Albert Kaplan at the El-Al Building. So you will no doubt hear from one of them.

I have also one postscript to the news bulletins about your friend Salandria and Co. A French entrepreneur has been in NYC trying to book a documentary film on the assassination, which includes the Zapruder film (a good print) in entirety. He will not say how he acquired the Z. film, but hints pointedly that RFK had a copy. He claims also to have some of the secreted autopsy photographs in his possession. But the news item is that this Frenchman told someone, who told me in turn, that he had had Ray Marcus booked by the Los Angeles police on a charge of theft. He claims that Ray stole a print of the Zapruder film out of his hotel room—that he left Ray alone there for a short time and when he returned both Ray and the film were gone. Ray had come to see him at Garrison's request, so the story goes. I put absolutely no stock in it, as to the alleged theft or the alleged booking by the police. Everything in which Garrison has any involvement has proved to be counterfeit and degrading to the "critics" who persist on acting as moths around his flame. In a way, I take some enjoyment from the progressive absurdity and disarray in the Garrison camp; but it is overshadowed by the bitterness I feel at the way my erstwhile colleagues have degraded themselves and the whole cause of criticism of the WR, to its present wild absurdity.

Ruth and I spent an evening together, on Thursday last. She still shows the after-effects of her flu and is looking much more slender and attractive. Where she finds the tenacity to deal with the mountainous chores which must be tackled before she can leave, I do not know.

Well, dear Menahem, let me hear from you, and may your news always be good news, after the vicissitudes of the last months.