

## The Relevance of Marxism

February 9, 1974

Dear comrade Freddy,

Last Saturday, February 2nd, I spent about three hours with Ruth Paine, from 11 a.m. until a little after two. It was a pleasant visit, postponed for two weeks because of illness and the excitement of my daughter's return from China. When I left Ruth asked me to "keep in touch," which I will surely do. I asked her consent to write to her, which she gave, but warned me not to expect answers to my letters as she is "not much" of a correspondent about the assassination. She does not plan to write or speak publicly on it. She bears scars from it and says it is still a painful subject.

I did not have a tape recorder and made no notes during the visit. Occasionally I referred to notes I had made beforehand.

In preparing for the visit I began a careful review of the testimony Ruth gave to the Warren Commission in 1964, but was unable to complete it, and I read a considerable amount of related material. The subject matter is complex and detailed and contradictory and needs extensive verification or refutation. From Ruth's testimony, in advance of meeting her, I evoked an image of an impulsively generous, independently minded, politically unsophisticated, morally but not righteously motivated, religious, middle class, patriotic woman. She was a crucial witness. She believed Oswald guilty and volunteered information adverse to him. Her testimony was useful to the Commission and buttressed its case. She said she had not read the Report of the Warren Commission, nor its 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits; nor the extensive literature of criticism and support of the Commission's work. She has a copy of Gerald Ford's Portrait of the Assassin but didn't know he had made use of classified material in writing it and that requests the matter be put to him in the hearings on his nomination to the Vice Presidency were ignored. She was not disturbed by the Commission's failure to dispose of the story the Oswalds' New Orleans neighbor, one, Eric Rogers, told the FBI that he had seen Marina, on the day she quit New Orleans for Irving, Texas, leave in the company of a woman (Ruth) and a short and stocky man in his forties, which contradicted Ruth's account she had been accompanied only by her small children. She did not seem impressed by the thought the Commission's treatment of this evidence made it possible for persons so inclined to cast doubt on her credibility and suspicion on her role in the assassination. Ruth expressed "great respect" for Warren Commission assistant counsel Jenner who had questioned her and is now minority counsel to the House Judiciary Committee in the investigation of possible grounds for the impeachment of President Nixon.

I emphasized the decisive evidentiary nature of the Zapruder

motion picture film of the assassination but apart from that we did not discuss physical evidence at length or in detail. And rather than criticize Ruth's role in the events preceding and following the assassination, challenge her testimony, or controvert her views I undertook an exposition of the political character of the assassination with emphasis on the problem of motivation, with respect to both the Commission's confessed inability to find a "definitive" motive and to establishment of the triggering motive in the conspiracy to wage large-scale war in Vietnam. I thought the theme of a war conspiracy would strike a chord in Ruth, a Quaker and pacifist. If it did Ruth gave no outward evidence of it. We did not pursue other recent political murders. I talked a little about the assassination of Lincoln. We did not discuss conspiracy theories. We agreed Executive Action is a bad motion picture.

I also discussed the political logic which led ineluctably from the assassination to the creation of the Warren Commission and which determined its findings. Ruth recognized Johnson's immediate problem on coming to power, was achievement of governmental stability and national calm but hadn't known the White House had adopted a policy of denuding the assassination of political cause and, during the night of the 22nd-23rd, had warned the Dallas police and prosecutors, already in full anticommunist cry, not to draw political conclusions from the assassination. She understood the difficulty of Johnson's task had been increased by Ruby's murder of Oswald and that creation of the Warren Commission as an agency of the executive branch of the government was a device to preempt investigation by Congress and cope with the swelling tide of suspicion and doubt. But she had not realized the Johnson policy of denuding the assassination of political significance established the limitations of the findings the Warren Commission could make. And that its foreordained conclusions determined its treatment of the intractable evidence it amassed and the character of its Report. I hope she was impressed by the stress I laid on the glaring contradiction between the Commission's position it had adduced physical evidence to identify Oswald as the secretive, calculating, and purposeful killer of the president and the unpremeditated and panicky public killer of a policeman, both in one day, and, on the other hand, its confessed inability, despite the unparalleled, minute, biographical research carried out in its behalf by the American and other governments in the Far East, Soviet Union, and the United States, to establish a definitive motive for the assassination of the president.

Ruth approved enthusiastically, when I told her about it the Commission's decision to accept and follow the advice of the prestigious psychiatrists it had consulted and to forbear from making psychiatric judgments about Oswald. Later in our conversation, however, she expressed the view Oswald was irrational. She seemed responsive to references to psycho-

logical problems and was interested in the account of my past and futile efforts to probe the anomaly of Oswald's facility in reading at an elevated philosophical and political level and his atrocious spelling, a phenomenon which, Ruth said, she has encountered more than once in the course of teaching. But she ventured no explanation.

The political approach to the assassination is apparently new to Ruth. But I think she is receptive to the idea that denuding the assassination of political significance and the proscription of psychiatric motivation rendered the Commission incapable of writing a biography of Oswald and restricted it to to compiling what it called a "chronology" of his life. My remark that this chronology contained no trace of plan or detailed preparation for assassination elicited no reply. But Ruth showed marked interest in the hand written tabular digest I had made of this chronology and read it attentively for several minutes. She made no comment on it. I asked no questions about her interest.

She also seemed interested in the parallels and contrasts I drew from time to time between events in Oswald's life and later developments in political life in the United States and the Soviet Union. At first she did not see point in relating Oswald's refusal, as he put it, in a letter to his brother Robert, to be used as a tool in the military oppression by the United States of other peoples, which motivated in part his flight to the Soviet Union, to the refusal less than ten years later of tens of thousands of young Americans to serve in Viet Nam and their flight to Canada and other countries and into underground life in the United States. More readily but not immediately apparent to Ruth was the parallel between the harassment of Marina by the Soviet government when she applied, during the dawn of Soviet-American detente, for an exit visa to accompany her husband to the United States, and the treatment a decade and more later, during the noonday of detente, of Jews yearning for escape to Israel. But then Ruth was quick to grasp the bitter irony of Marina's experience - expulsion from the Komsomol and interrogation by the secret police when she wished to leave the Soviet Union; harassment by the FBI, sequestration by the Secret Service, and interrogation, intimidation, and compulsion to betray her dead husband by the United States government when she wished to remain in this country. I did not draw parallels between the assassination and Watergate with respect to the suppression and destruction of evidence, and other matters.

Also new to Ruth, I gathered, was the approach to Lee and Marina Oswald considered as a union of two persons who were the products, so to speak, of two fundamentally historic and disparate and antagonistic social systems, engulfed by a life-shattering catastrophe. She was not responsive to my emphasis on Oswald's consistent, "lifelong," Marxist idealism, but agreed his self-taught Marxism was essentially theoretical.

She was repelled by his dogmatism, thought him not open to reason and fact. She seemed unaware of his known writings, published by the government posthumously, containing bitter criticism of the Soviet system and the Communist Party of the United States, and projecting a future democratic communist society, following nuclear holocaust, combining the "best" features of both the American and Soviet systems. And Ruth made no response to my observation the total lack of reference in Oswald's reported conversations and known writings to China and the Chinese-Soviet conflict seemed inexplicably strange on the part of one who was keenly interested in world affairs and subscribed to radical publications; Ruth thought Oswald received and read a paper from Minsk.

Apparently she did not regard Oswald's cool conduct in custody and frank avowal of his Marxist beliefs, in contrast to the "communists" of the McCarthy era who pleaded the fifth amendment to withhold their beliefs, as a positive index of character. It seems not to have occurred to her his protestation of innocence and request for legal assistance made his murder an urgent necessity. She knew, of course, Oswald made persistent efforts to find work and support his family, but had no comment on the seeming oddity of his electronic and machinist skills acquired in the Marine Corps and in the Soviet Union, and his unskilled jobs in New Orleans and Dallas after his return to the United States. I did not inquire whether Ruth was aware Oswald had been handicapped in his search for work by the change of his honorable discharge from the Marine Corps in 1959 to a less than honorable discharge in 1960 following his hegira to the Soviet Union. But although she had expressed confidence in the FBI in her testimony, she did not object to the suggestion that agency may have been directly or indirectly responsible for at least a part of his work difficulties. I did not draw her attention to the very recent revelation of the persistent surveillance and disruption by the FBI, from 1947 to the mid sixties, of the Socialist Workers Party to which Oswald had applied by mail for membership and which had been refused him, the party testified, because it had no branch in Oswald's area. Ruth did not demur when I pointed out it was unlikely Oswald had been a government agent, an idea which had occurred to her she had testified, inasmuch as he was precluded from penetrating the right by his defection to the Soviet Union, and from penetrating the left by his hostility to it following his return to the United States.

Our discussion about Marina was more delicate. It touched on wounded feelings. I detected no bitterness. When I asked Ruth to consider Marina in the light of the Soviet claim socialism had been attained in the Soviet Union and had transformed bourgeois man into "new Soviet man," her response related only to the change in the relationship between Marina and herself after the assassination. She was puzzled and hurt by Marina's turning from her. She thought Marina had concealed from her Oswald's alleged attempt to kill General Walker, of which Ruth believed him guilty, and his possession of a rifle, to which Ruth would have objected as a

pacifist, in order to protect her husband. Ruth thought these were matters American friends would have talked about but that Marina reflected Soviet experience in which one did not talk about such affairs even with friends living under the same roof. On the other hand, Ruth said that when the police came to the house in Irving on November 22, said they had Lee Harvey Oswald in custody for the murder of a policeman, and asked whether he had a gun, she promptly said, "no," and Marina, after translation, said "yes." Ruth made no comment to me about the lack of reference by the police, at that point, to the assassination of the president, of which both women were aware from watching television. Nor did Ruth make comment about the inquiry about a gun when, by police account, the pistol with which officer Tippit had been killed was found on Oswald when arrested. It is possible one or more of these anomalies were explored in that part of Ruth's testimony which I have yet to study. If so, what she said in 1964 may shed light on the matter and on her reticence during our discussion last Saturday. Ruth did not object to my characterization of Marina as disloyal to her husband and agreed that in view of Marina's statement to the Commission she had been told by the Secret Service she had to cooperate with the government if she wished to remain in the United States, her credibility as a witness was destroyed. Reference was not made to Marina's change of sworn testimony and consideration given in the Commission to citing her for perjury. We did not explore Marina's lack of support for her husband's Marxist views and ideals and, in contrast to her husband, her appreciation of material comforts. We agreed she had a characteristically Russian facility in talking or writing about the heart and a philosophic strain in her comments on life - at the age of 22!

When I asked Ruth what had convinced her of Oswald's guilt, she said it was, in the first place, his attempt to kill Walker and his possession of a rifle, confirmed for her by discovery in her garage of the blanket which had contained it, and discovery of a light in the garage, indicating, she believed, a surreptitious foray by Oswald during the preceding night to retrieve and disassemble the rifle. Leaving his wedding ring behind when he left for Dallas early in the morning of the 22nd, Ruth feels, indicated his anticipation he might not return. We discussed the last point only briefly and inconclusively and concentrated on the attack on Walker. I advanced the view that acceptance of that allegation entailed also acceptance of the motive alleged for the attack - that Walker was a dangerous fascist and killing him would save lives in the future. And, I emphasized, that view was of a piece with the establishmentarian justification for atom-bombing Japan and with Nixon's rationale of waging war to obviate greater conflict, and bombing for peace. It was not Oswald's political line. Moreover, if that was Oswald's motive for assassinating Walker, it precluded his killing Kennedy whom he did not regard as fascist, whom he liked, as Ruth knew, and whose civil-rights policy he approved. She listened attentively but made neither positive nor negative response.

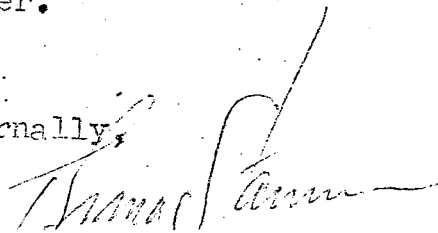
In this connection we discussed the discovery of the note Oswald was supposed to have written Marina on the eve of his attack on Walker, which implicated him and which Marina, so she said, kept and kept to herself to restrain her husband from additional exploits in the same genre. I inquired about the strange sequence of events which began on November 23rd, 1963, when police came to the house in Irving for the second time, on this occasion with a search warrant. On the preceding day police had searched Ruth's house and garage and carted off a miscellany of the Oswalds' and Paine belongings despite Ruth's protests a number of the items were her personal property with no conceivable bearing on the charge against Oswald. Apparently Ruth's curiosity or anxiety was not aroused by the second appearance of police at her house on the day following the first search and she did not read or scan their search warrant. Moreover, despite her distress at the behavior of the police the day before, she left them alone in her house on the 23rd for some two hours while she went shopping. As she left she saw them leafing through books. Days later the Secret Service came to Ruth to question her about a note in Russian which had reached them, they said, from the Irving police who had obtained it when it fell from a book given to them with other things by Ruth after the assassination for delivery to Marina who was then in protective Secret Service custody. Ruth was permitted to see only a portion of the note which, she said, consisted of two or three pages. She did not recognize the handwriting but thought it genuinely Oswald's because she noticed the English word "key" written in Cyrillic script. She did not explain. Ruth said, "no," when I asked whether it had ever occurred to her the note might have been a forgery. And she said she had never considered the possibility the police might have been leafing through her books in order to place a note in one of them. But she did say she regrets deeply not having stayed home to observe the police search of her home on the 23rd.

In closing, I asked Ruth whether the events of the last ten years or anything she had seen, heard, or read had caused her to change the opinions she had formed during personal contact with ~~the~~ the assassination and its aftermath. She said nothing had.

In fine, I am glad I went to see and talk with Ruth Paine. I am glad I made her acquaintance. I am grateful to you for making it possible. However, because of Ruth's reserve, owing in good part, I am sure, to my overlong expositions, but also to other causes which I can only sense, I gained little insight into the baffling problems of Oswald's marriage and his connection with the assassination. Ruth may be more at ease and more talkative, more revealing another time, especially if she can be convinced Oswald did not kill Kennedy or Tippit and was the planned victim of a frame up. I think I will work up all the data on the Walker shooting and send it to her.

Can you put me in touch with Michael Paine?

Fraternally,



My typing hasn't improved in forty years.