

May 30, 1975

Dear Carl,

It is almost five weeks since you telephoned to let me know Allard Lowenstein could be seen and heard a minute or two later on Wm F Buckley's TV Firing Line program, discussing the assassination of Robert F Kennedy. I think our very brief conversation ended with agreement to discuss the program at a later date. Since then nothing has passed between us. So before it fades entirely from faltering memory - I made no notes while listening to that distressing colloquy - here is one view of it.

The discussion was seemingly apolitical and restricted to problems of ballistic evidence. Whether this was Buckley's choice I do not know. I incline to the view it was Lowenstein's. The reasoning is - The assassination of Senator R F Kennedy, leading candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, was an obviously political murder; crucial elements of his political line - accommodation with the soviet and "third worlds; withdrawal from Vietnam - gave him good prospects for gaining the White House in the pending election and made him, therefore, a dangerous threat to interests which had contrived the assassination of his brother and come to dominance in the Johnson Administration, were prosecuting war in southeast Asia, and confronting mounting hostility in the United States; like the murder of his elder brother, the RFK assassination was incidental to an intracapitalist class struggle for power - John F possessed it and had to be removed and Robert F was reaching for it and had to be eliminated.

r/ While the Kennedy murders, occurring five years apart, are linked by the political line of the slain brothers, and are explicable ultimately only in political-historical context, each is the outcome of a specific situation, macabre testimony to the inadequacy of the American bourgeois democratic republic, when vital interests are at stake, to resolve capitalist class conflicts by "normal" means. In the "liberal" perception of these events the Kennedy assassinations, the unsuccessful attempt on presidential candidate Wallace in 1972, and Edward Kennedy's fear of meeting his brothers' fate should he contend for presidential power ~~and~~ like Watergate, only aberrations in an imperfect system. Old revolutionaries, recalling Mussolini's farcical "March on Rome," Hindenburg's ominous designation of Hitler as Chancellor of the Weimar Republic, Franco's slaughter of the Spanish working class, and the passivity of the American working class in 1963 and 1968, can read the Kennedy murders as sardonic refutation of Earl Browder's pronouncement during the election campaign of 1936: "...bringing gunman, gangster, vigilante politics into presidential elections...is one of the characteristic features of fascism...we must understand that the murder of the semi-fascist, Huey Long, marked a further advance toward fascism in America" (What Is Communism?, Chapter V, Huey Long's Assassination, pp 64, 66).

Buckley, a Jesuitic metaphysician and ideologue of "conservatism," is capable, I believe, of appreciating the dialectical ironies of the Kennedy assassinations and might relish political discussion of them. But Lowenstein, a petit bourgeois liberal former Congressman seeking issues and supporters to become again a parliamentary creature, is in an unenviable position. He cannot defend the discredited official versions of the Kennedy assassinations now under intense attack again; neither can he attack government assassination policy lest he offend the powerful Kennedy interests which have their own cogent reasons for accepting the official versions of the brothers' murders, or antagonize the even more powerful interests in control of the American imperialist state. So Lowenstein, like so many others, each of whom has as good a cause, attempts a "safe" middle course, disingenuously limiting himself to problems of evidence. And so, ironically and inevitably, he accommodates himself, as did Buckley, to the government's policy of denuding the Kennedy assassinations of political motivation and significance by projecting them as random, plotted but unspiratorial, senseless acts of alienated or deranged individuals, intrusions into history which, as everyone knows, is made by great men in government and heroes on the battlefield. Buckley's political nihilism in the colloquy with Lowenstein, very likely ~~intentionally~~ *was an opportunist concession* to the latter's opportunism.

Lowenstein did his best to accommodate himself to Buckley, protesting again and again the sincerity of his self-restriction to problems of ballistic evidence ("I could not sleep if I were to attribute the assassination to the CIA"), and of the limitation of his concern to achievement of new ballistic tests. But here, too, Lowenstein contrived not to challenge the establishment decisively; it is not wise to spit in wells from which one may want to drink. As others have failed in the JFK assassination to make the definitive evidence of the Zapruder film of an enfilading ambush in Dealey Plaza the touchstone for refutation of the contradictory medicoballistic evidence concocted by the government, so Lowenstein forebore to make the uncontroverted autopsy evidence in the RFK assassination of death by gunshot wound in the rear of the head, in conjunction with Sirhan's frontal assault, the unanswerable basis for concluding the killing of RFK was the work of a conspiracy - as in the assassination of brother JFK.

Lowenstein made a pitch for new ballistic tests without being asked about or remarking on the failure of the FBI, Secret Service, and other trusts by private individuals and organizations to resolve persisting ambiguities and contradictions in the assassination of president Kennedy. Worse, he expressed willingness to leave such tests in the hands of the Los Angeles authorities and stipulated no safeguards against manipulation of the tests or misrepresentation of the results. It was distasteful to watch and hear Lowenstein, an attractive, articulate, intelligent, political operator whose style is to seek support by frank or subtle flattery, try to cozen Buckley into a "coalition" to work for new tests.

Not surprisingly, Buckley, who seemed nonplussed by the spate of Lowenstein's protestations of selfless sincerity, withstood the flood. He did better. Slyly, as is his wont, he asked Lowenstein if the new tests with Sirhan's pistol would be like the test made with Sacco's pistol "twenty five years later." Lowenstein mistook, for agreement the petard Buckley offered him and was hoist with it.

A test was made with Sacco's pistol. Not twenty five years after commission of the crime charged to him and Vanzetti in 1920, and not a quarter of a century after he and Vanzetti were murdered in and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The test was made forty one years after the event in 1961 and was reported in Tragedy in Deadham by Francis Russell. Book and test were reviewed in the New Republic of March 2, 1963, under the heading Was Sacco Guilty?, by Michael Musmano, of defense counsel for Sacco and Vanzetti, author of After Twelve Years, and Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; now deceased.

Musmano wrote: "Now, Russell produces two experts of his own - Jac Weller and Frank Jury. They fired a test bullet through the ancient Sacco pistol and compared it with the ancient Beradelli (slain guard - TS) bullet and, in the words of Russell, 'determined beyond dispute' that the Beradelli bullet had passed through Sacco's pistol." Musmano noted, "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts claimed that Sacco's pistol fired the Beradelli bullet. Sacco denied it..." So the test had aim of supporting the prosecution's case against Sacco and, by implication, justifying his execution.

Of the test, Musmano wrote, "A firearms test can obviously be no more reliable than the persons who conduct it ... In 1957 before Jac Weller or Frank Jury ever saw Sacco's pistol or the Beradelli bullet, in a book entitled Identification and Evidence, they approved the following statement: 'There can be no doubt that Sacco's pistol fired one cartridge case and one of the fatal bullets.'" (Dr. Lattimer and other defenders of the Warren Commission, please note!)

Again, to quote Musmano, "If the test of a firearm is to have any meaning whatever, the weapon must be in the same condition, when tested, as it was when the criminal shooting occurred." (Frazier's and Simmons' tests with "Oswald's rifle, defective scope and firing pin included). "The bullet involved in the criminal shooting, when later compared with a test bullet, must also be in the same condition as it was when fired into a human body." How do the Sacco pistol and the Beradelli bullet fare under these absolutely minimum standards of proof?"

And, Musmano found, "As early as 1923, the barrel of Sacco's pistol had become 'fouled' and 'rusty,' Russell admits... Russell tells how when Jac Weller and Frank Jury tested the Sacco pistol in 1961, its barrel was so incrustated with rust that the test could not be conducted without first cleansing the barrel of rust... The two experts fired two shots through the pistol to 'clear the rust from the barrel.' By doing so they blasted away all scientific similarity between the Sacco pistol of 1920 and the Sacco pistol of 1961... the Beradelli bullet... also had rusted. Almost naively, Russell says that the bullet was washed before testing. He does not state in what it was washed. Soap and water would not remove rust. If it was washed in acid, this could affect the constituency of the metal..."

And so on and more. Musmano concluded, "The crowning nonsense of Russell's assertion of the infallibility of ~~the~~ the... test is ~~that~~ the test was conducted without any court or official supervision and without the presence of any established impartial ex-

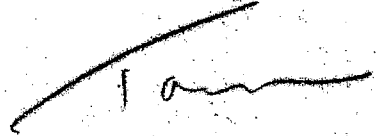
pert to check on accuracy. The...test, if presented in court, would be ruled out with a possible stern reproof from the presiding judge as a ludicrous attempt to submit ex parte guesswork as reliable evidence in so solemn a matter as a murder case."

Some nice questions: had either the punditic program host or his engaging sel-salesman guest read Russell's book or Musmano's review? Did Sacco really believe, alas like Max Eastman when he became an editor of Reader's Digest, Sacco guilty and Vanzetti innocent? Was he testing Lowenstein's incredible sincerity and ignorance? His pliability? On the speculative assumption Lowenstein, a latter day countertenor in the assassination chorus, had some knowledge of the music, was he singing an improvised falsetto seconds to what he took for Buckley's primo?

What does it matter? Do we not owe thanks to both knaves for reminding us exclusive preoccupation with physical evidence in these murders is an endless dead end; efforts to strip them of political motivation and significance are, inescapably, political acts which serve government assassination policy; the killings of the Kennedys signify American capitalist democracy is alive though malignantly sick.

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The same March 2, 1963 issue of the New Republic contains an editorial by one, Ralph Winnett, titled Siqueiros, in which reference is made to the first assassination attempt on Trotsky and the related murder of his guard, Robert Sheldon Harte.