

November 15, 1975

Dear Tillie,

Thanks for sending me the October issue of Commentary magazine with Jacob Cohen's feature article, attacking "critics" of the Warren Commission Report, which is excellent for raising blood pressure and exciting contempt. I don't know what to make of your accompanying enigmatic note. Cohen's piece has an unreal quality. Although it is titled Conspiracy Fever, it does not address the problem of conspiracy directly with respect to the assassination of president Kennedy. Perhaps he reserved that for the book he is completing "on allegations of government conspiracy in connection with the Lincoln assassination, the Mooney-Billings case, Alger Hiss, the Rosenbergs, and the assassinations of the 60's" (editorial note identifying the author). Did you wonder about the omission of Sacco-Vanzetti? Was it the editor's idea? Or Cohen's? If the latter, is there connection, do you think, between that omission and Cohen's teaching in the "Department of American Studies at Brandeis," which is in Massachusetts where the assassination of Sacco and Vanzetti is a sensitive subject the Kennedys do not seem eager to reinvestigate?

Like the "critics" he castigates, Tillie, not spanks, Cohen's approach is non-political and does not address such other crucial assassination issues as motivation; Oswald's presumed, asserted, and proved innocence; and the Johnson government's assassination policy, including the role it assigned the Warren Commission. Like the "critics" he stereotypes psychologically, Cohen is preoccupied with ancient problems of medico-ballistic evidence. He considers only selected evidence accepted by the Warren Commission, none rejected by it, none ignored by it, and none developed independently of the government. He makes errors of large and small fact.

It is tempting to explore the tortuous disposition Cohen makes of the contradiction between the convincing evidence of the Zapruder film of the assassination that the shot which tore away part of Kennedy's head and flung him violently backward and to his left was fired from a point in front of his limousine, and the undated autopsy report which concluded all the shots striking Connally and Kennedy were fired from "behind and above" their targets. But as you can see from the accompanying "diary" entries I called Leaves, I have resolved to clear my faltering mind and waning time of the problems of physical evidence which is contradictory, ambiguous, distorted, and fabricated, and is an endless diversion from the overshadowing issues of the assassination. Instead of tedious and distasteful recapitulation of old analyses I include copies of correspondence with Dr Lattimer, a stubborn supporter of the official account of the assassination, and Dr Wecht, a confused and vacillating "critic," relating to the Zapruder film and the autopsy.

However, Cohen's curious reasoning is another matter. He believes "Most human events leave a trail of ambiguous evidence," and "living with slight ambiguities should not prove an impossible burden for a citizen to carry through life," ^ubut resolves the dilemma of film and autopsy in a priori favor of the government by citing - I hope accurately - the opinion of the Rockefeller Commission (on the CIA) experts the gyrations of Kennedy's body resulted, not from the impact of a murderous bullet, but from a spasm-like neuromuscular reaction caused by damage to brain centers, resulting from the impact of the bullet. Hence, the direction from which the bullet was fired is irrelevant. Ergo the autopsy report is correct: the fatal shot originated from a point in Kennedy's rear. QED. Euclid may not be pleased

but can't you see Talmudic exegetes dancing with joy?

Our logician's attempt to resolve contradiction derives from the humorous idea, "the opposite of a fact is a lie," which he attributes to Hannah Arendt. If it is really that intellectual luminary's belief, should not we who read Hamlet together conclude the sparkling exchanges in the gravedigger's scene were wasted on her? Or was dialectical thought interred there with "maimed rites?" It were a grievous pleasure to joust with the lady but our quarry is the knight who wears her fragile ^{philosophic} scarf.

The obvious target of Cohen's strictures is "critics." His censures do not extend to historians, political analysts, writers, and hosts of others who, in common with "millions," disbelieve the monotouch of Cohen's faith, the Warren Report. Because he wears the colors of "obvious" truth, our knight tilts with envenomed lance against "occasionally...conscious liars" and "cranks" at whom "everyone" should shake their fingers and say: 'For shame!'

Five vassals are run through. Jay Epstein, "respected" for the "moderate tone" of his Inquest, offends because he created "suspense" by discussing "anomalies arising out of the evidence," even though he "does not charge a massive conspiracy." O'Toole's "fanciful book...received a big play in the sex magazines;" he "rehearses" "far fetched" "lines of argument," and suggests the assassination wasn't completely clean." Josiah Thompson, whose "momentary ingenuity and passionate sincerity count for nothing" in "matters of factual truth," knows that "major portions of his Six Seconds in Dallas "must be discarded as baseless gossip," as does "every student of the assassination." The "skeptical" Dr Wecht can be quoted in support of the Warren Commission but otherwise is guilty of exploiting subtle "distinctions" to "give rise" to dishonest "differences

of expert opinion." Lane "is back on the college lecture circuit rehashing old mischief."

And so, like Hamlet's father's ghost, Cohen wears "his beaver up." Very like what alarmed our gallant polemicist is the sympathetic response, nationwide, of large college audiences to the attacks Lane, Thompson, and others, "critics," make on the official account of the assassination. From Cohen's article I would conclude students at Brandeis share their peers' disdain.

More, I remind myself, discredit of the Warren Commission now reflects adversely ^{on} Nixon's White House pardoner who was a Warren Commissioner and the author of a scurrilous book defaming Oswald posthumously, which made illegal use of classified material; this accessory after the fact to murder must not be offended by supporters of Israel's cause lest the leader of the free world obstruct or deny Israel's requests for aid; Brandeis is an important component of the American Jewish community and the pro-Israel lobby; and Cohen's academic career would be imperiled by untimely attack on government assassination policy. Hence his animadversions on "critics."

Unlike Don Quixote, however, our crusader against evil in academe does not joust in accordance with the code of chivalry. He assails not only the evildoers but the victims of their chicanery as well. Marx taught the masses make history. Cohen believes "The public" can be only "a spectator" of his struggle with the "antic accusations" and "demonological assumptions" of the "critics" who attack our beleaguered chevalier from "contradictory directions;" and whose "passionate and apparently well-informed dissent" has helped "two-thirds and more of the American public (to) doubt the essential conclusions of the Warren Commission." This misguided public, however,

"never judges issues on their merits." This public, including millions of unemployed workers, lacks "the time, inclination, opportunity," and "ability." The public "forms its conclusions from the sound and style of the debate and its brute sense of the plausible."

"What is alarming" in our tzadik's view, he writes in 1975, after Watergate and in the midst of continuing revelations of government criminality, is that the public's "sense of the plausible has come to include incredible charges of government wrong-doing."

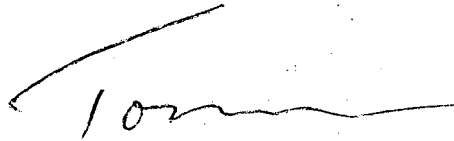
So much for Cohen. Poor man, more to be pitied than hated. How will he fare in the Great American Proletarian Cultural Revolution? In the Campaign To Criticize Jacob Cohen and Marie Antoinette for their antidemocratic elitist attitudes and values?

But what of Commentary? I do not read it. You do. Tell me, is the material it publishes usually of so miserably low a level?

If not, what is the reason for the instant exception? Are the editors, like the writer, currying favor with the government in behalf of the Zionist state?

And you, old friend, who grew up in a socialist household, how is it with your sense of the plausible? How will you bid? Or will you pass again?

Affectionately,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tom', written in a cursive style.

We must go to the masses and learn from them - Mao