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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

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February 17, 1966

Mr. Al Friendly
The Washington Post
1515 L St., nw
Washington, D.C.

PERSONAL

Dear Mr. Friendly,

This morning's editorial, "The Trial Ends", is an excellent affirmation of the basic rights and responsibilities of writers and governments in the modern world. I would have appreciated it more had publishers been included, and regretted it less had it not, with a few minor changes, fit my experiences during the last year so uncomfortably, yet so exactly.

It is as easy to cudgel the other fellow as for pigs to find truffles. Few bludgeon themselves; few on the issue of press and writers' freedoms shouldn't. The purpose of this letter is to tell you that you personally and the Washington Post should.

You would cast the mote from the Soviet eye - and with this I am in complete accord - but leave it in your own.

Early last summer "Mac" Mathias, after reading my book on the Warren Report, asked if he might show it to you. He was familiar with its non-publishing history, of which I shall tell you more, but in confidence, and thought it important that you personally and the Post know what I had proved. "Mac" had been unwilling to believe what I reported to him as I worked on this (about 7,000 hours, represented by more than a third of a million words of typed notes alone), but knowing my sincerity and understanding that I wanted someone I could trust to know the essence of what I knew he had listened. He found my manuscript "fascinating", said he was "shocked and shaken" and that, as a lawyer, he was particularly impressed by what I had done. As you know from his failure to do anything since then, he had no ulterior motive in speaking to you, and as you must realize, when he took as much time as he did in an unsuccessful effort to persuade you, he must have felt the effort important.

I realize there is potential for harm to people in my book, and I have gone so far out of my way to avoid or minimize this that the only unfavorable editorial comment of any substantive nature it has received is that I leaned too far backwards to be fair. I was also criticized by one editor for my failure to "cut and slash"; but more pointed out the high degree of responsibility and the respectfulness for the Commission it reflects. I will return to this, but may I ask is any one in our society more important than the society itself? Do we preserve a democratic system by perpetuating the jeopardy to which it has been subjected by error, no matter how highly motivated? Is any President ever safe if one can be assassinated and interred with a phoney inquest for an epitaph? Is the democratic system then safe?

It happens I still believe Earl Warren is one of the great men in our society. I believe he will be unhappy when my book is finally printed, but I believe he will respect both it and the motives behind it and will have no serious objections to it.

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He is a grown man and will have to stand on his own feet, unproped by his friends and admirers, who will not live forever. But since this is all in confidence, I will tell you things that bear on this. When I had established the nature of the whitewash beyond question, I asked a former law clerk of the Chief Justice to call what I had to his attention. I repeated this request several times, without result. Thereafter, because of the great danger, as I see it, to the integrity of the Kennedy reputation and the honor of the country, I went to Senator Robert Kennedy's office and offered a copy to him, without asking anything in return. I explained that, with Manchester having made public the line of his book, I believe it would be a tragedy for the family, especially for the dead President, for the family to be in the position of paying for the buttressing of a totally invalid Report that should require no fortification, and pointed out the potential effect this could have on the political futures of the present Kennedys. There has been no request from the Senator or anyone representing him for the book. Further, when I learned Harper's had contracted for the Manchester book and of a friendship between Cass Cabfield and the Kennedys, I offered Harper's a copy of my book and all the data supporting it so they could call it to the attention of whoever representing the Kennedy interests they desired. I have heard nothing further. You can see all of this was at potential cost to me. I am broke, in debt and have invested time and money between \$25,000 and \$40,000 in this work. I believe you will not accuse me of exaggeration when I say I was offering a sacrifice. Further, I asked "Mac" to speak to Robert Kennedy and he did not, believing it might be against my interest. The book has since been read by the legislative assistants to two Senators who have an interest in some of its contents.

In all, it has been offered to more than 50 publishers, about half of whom will not consider any serious aspect of the subject and would not read it. Of those who read it, I have a collection of letters I am quite willing to show you in which the praises are the highest, not at all the polite brush one would expect under the circumstances, for in each case the executive editor was conveying the rejection of the publisher over his recommendation. You can see, such friendly comments were hard, not easy to make, and required some courage. You declined the opportunity to see for yourself what the nature of the book is, but there can be no doubt of its merit and quality. And it is absolutely solid on fact. Most of the publishers pretend there is no interest in the subject. I cannot imagine any greater insult to the American people. Their editors dispute them, in writing, and the one major publisher who explained his legitimate fear of the government in another field had earlier, after four readings, told me this would be the best-selling book of 1965, a not inconsiderable compliment. He has printed such books in the past, and he knows what it takes to put a book in this category. But imagine, Mr. Friendly: a President has been assassinated, much of the world questions the official version, and not a single American publisher, not a single major magazine or newspaper, will print a substantial word of analysis. On the question of interest, a paperback outfit in New York printed a pot-boiler, an entirely superficial and inadequate piece of incompetence that agrees with the Commission's major conclusion. Its initial 200,000 first printing was exhausted and replenished three times in a month. No interest? And all this with no advertising and no reviews that I saw - merely on display of the book.

Which, of course, leads to the editorial, to the rights and freedoms of writers, and to assorted obligations. Let me quote from it a few sentences in which you can make a few minor ~~substituti~~ substitutions: "...presenting... the truth as they saw it. This is the single essential function of art." "They were punished for their views; that is the central point.", "The United States...needs the kind of independent critical analysis supplied... In the short run, perhaps probing honest criticism of any established order may be embarrassing, but in the long run it is essential." "The Soviet Government has acted as though the Sinyavsky-Daniel brief would undermine

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it. This is ridiculous." "The Communist Party has an interest in maintaining a theoretical monopoly on 'truth'. Hence its compulsion to squelch independent-minded men." "If some men will court death in order to speak out, many more men will speak out if they need not court death. ...Far better that it should recognize how valuable critics are."

Now let me remind you that before I wrote this book I offered a collaboration with the Post, anticipating many of the problems I have faced. My offer was for you to do the writing. This, certainly, reflects no preconceptions that would not bear scrutiny, no apprehension about the factual information, does it? I wanted to continue my inquiries, for when you get your head out of the sand you will suddenly realize that assassins are running loose, and if they represented, let us say, evil forces, the hazard continues.

You finally consented for one of your staff to read the book. He got less than ten percent of the way through it in more than two months, during which time my ribbon copy was tied up. Most of the editors who read it did so over night and expressed their fascination with it. I had then thought you might find the syndication rights of some interest and value.

Unfortunately, you have no monopoly, sad to say for our country and the sanity of its basic institutions. Nor do publishers. My agent, with tentative commitments on two other books (one of which a major agent says can make a movie) suddenly got hysterical and resigned over this subject. The next five agents I approached all were interested in a new client until they heard the subject of the book. Finally, the Saturday Evening Post, which was considering a 20,000-word summary, got me an agent (their first also said no, even though there was a \$1,000 check just waiting to be picked up, so far as he knew) who read the book, said it was a really excellent job and that he would represent me, but without optimism. He is Max Wilkinson, of Littauer and Wilkinson. Ten or twelve weeks later he wrote me he was satisfied no American publisher would now touch the subject. The Post paid me the unhappy compliment of saying the book was too tightly written and could not be adequately summarized in 40,000 words, which, of course, is book length.

What happens to freedom of the press - and us without it - if publishers impose upon themselves a censorship the government cannot impose upon them? How is our press thus basically different from the controlled press where the government exercises control directly? What about the crisis in credibility? What about an informed electorate being the ultimate source of power and authority? What about the decisions that must be made in a nuclear age, with the potentiality of error too gruesome to contemplate? And the vested interests of advisers in justifying their own wrong advice and positions? Is the President really free? Are his decisions controlled for him?

I do hope you will understand there is nothing personal in this. But I am serious. I think we are in sad shape. And I think much of the fault is the default of the press, which cannot see its obligations for its profits or its friends, or has, with its prosperity and that of its writers, become complacent. Why, also, should other writers undertake such chores as I did? Look at what such things do to our society.

You told "Mac" you just were unwilling to believe what he told you I proved. As I recall what he told me, you also said you knew all about the autopsy. I tell you that you do not, and if you are willing to have me call you, I challenge you to read just that chapter of my book, while I stand by with the official information of which it is based. Meanwhile, I hope the Post keeps writing such editorials and reporting the events upon which they are based. They are important. But so would a few of domestic character be.

Sincerely yours,
Harold Weisberg

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The Trial Ends

PM 2/17/66
The opprobrium which has descended on the Soviet government for its conviction of two writers is richly deserved. Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel were guilty of nothing more than presenting the artistic version of the truth as they saw it. This is the single essential function of art.

That the two men were convicted for writing as prophets rather than parrots is not vitiated by the fact that they got a semipublic trial and not a star chamber hearing or a bullet. They were punished for their views; that is the central point. Now self-degrading that the Soviet public should now be summoned to blindly condemn the two men for views it has never been allowed to read.

The irony is that the Soviet Union, like the United States and Upper Volta and every other inhabited point on this earth, vitally needs the kind of independent critical analysis summoned by Sinyavsky and Daniel. In the short run perhaps, probing honest criticism of any established order may be embarrassing but in the long run it is essential. This is particularly so for the Soviet Union, whose every major advance has been in response to conscientious criticism. At each stage, the critics have first been suppressed.

The Soviet government has acted as though the Sinyavsky-Daniel brief would undermine it. This is ridiculous. The Soviet system has admitted much criticism since Stalin, all belated and all beneficial. The government still stands and the people rarely riot in the streets. Soviet power is strong and one wonders why the Kremlin should show so much more doubt than its native critics.

The Communist Party has an interest in maintaining a theoretical monopoly on "truth." Hence its compulsion to squat atop independent-minded men. But the Party is in trouble, probably permanent trouble. Stalin used the terror to enforce the Party's will, but nothing less will do. If some men will court death in order to speak out, many more men will speak out if they need not court death. Unless the Kremlin is willing to kill its critics, it must learn to live with them. Far better that it should recognize how valuable critics are.