

L.A. Sheriffs Deny Reporter Interview With Jailed RFK Death Probe Investigator

by Greg Roberts

Several more reasons surfaced last week strongly indicating that Sherman Block should not be elected to the position of L.A. County Sheriff by the voters this June, even though he was appointed to that post by the L.A. Supervisors' Board last month.

For one thing, discrimination against the alternative press and its reporters, whether freelance or not, continues unabashed under Appointed Sheriff Block and in some respects is even worse than it was under former Sheriff Pete Pitchees.

A freelance reporter, Greg Roberts welcomes comments at P.O. Box 8491, North Hollywood, Calif. 91608.

Meanwhile, last week Theodore R. ("Teddy") Charach, age 50, the co-producer of the film, "The Second Gun — Who Killed Robert Kennedy?" was jailed at the L.A. Sheriff's Central Jail facility in downtown L.A. following his conviction for his alleged role in an airline ticket forgery scheme which bilked Delta, Pam Am and American Airlines out of a reported \$142,000.

Charach, who has lived in the Hollywood area for most of his adult life and operated his own news service, was found guilty on all 11 counts of grand theft, forgery and conspiracy by a six-man, six-woman jury in the courtroom of L.A. Superior Judge Florence Pikard last Monday, February 8.

The jury had deliberated for eight days following a lengthy six-week trial which began December 28, 1981.

An account of the impact Charach had in earlier years as an investigative filmmaker in shaking the credibility of the joint Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)-L.A. District Attorney's Office lone-assassin verdict in the June, 1968 assassination of the late U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, can be found in the paperback book, *The Assassination Chain*, by Bert Sugar and Sybil Laek.

Charach was one of three persons charged thus far by the D.A.'s Major Frauds Division (MFD), which acted on information brought to it by the LAPD's Parker Center-based Bunco-Forgery Division.

Charach and the two co-defendants, Judith Ann Metzger, age 36, a professional astrologer from Beverly Hills, and Robert M. Conviser, age 40, formerly of Agoura and now reportedly out of the county, were charged with the ticket forgery scheme in May, 1981.

According to the D.A.'s MFD prosecutor, "The defendants purchased

quantities of 'short haul,' relatively inexpensive airline tickets, chemically removed the routing and rate information, and replaced it with information designating longer flights at a higher price.

"For instance, a \$26.50 ticket for a flight from Los Angeles to San Diego would be altered to indicate a \$3,273 ticket for a flight from Atlanta to London to Los Angeles," the prosecuting attorney said.

"The altered tickets would then be



Teddy Charach
(Photo by G. Roberts)

sold at a discount, and the defendant's model realize a large profit," he added when talking to reporters after the verdict came in.

"Ms. Metzger pleaded 'no contest' to charges in the case last October, received a four-year state prison term, and testified in Charach's behalf at the trial," the D.A./MFD prosecutor noted.

As we reported on this overall case last September ("LAPD Mystery Man in Reputed Airline Ticket Scam," 9-25-81 edition), Conviser is a fugitive and the object of LAPD Felony Warrant No. A-357875 and was at that time believed by police to "...be in England at an unknown address."

Both before and during the trial, Charach steadfastly maintained his innocence.

While testifying on his own behalf during the trial, Charach admitted traveling

from Los Angeles to Europe and throughout Europe in 1979, 1980 and again in early 1981 and back to the United States, and specifically Los Angeles in each case, largely using forged airline tickets.

Specifically, Charach admitted having used some of the forged or chemically-altered airline tickets which police eventually recovered from the airlines and which the prosecutor introduced into evidence at the trial.

Charach said he had purchased the forged airline tickets from several persons whom he characterized at his trial as being allegedly unscrupulous travel agents, one of whom was reported to be in Poland during the time of the trial, and didn't know they were forged tickets when he was using them on what he said were three separate business trips.

After the trial, Charach's private defense lawyer said he questioned the jurors at length and was basically told "...they wouldn't have found him guilty if we had offered no defense and not put Mr. Charach and most, if not all, of our other defense witnesses on the stand."

"The jurors said they didn't believe that the prosecutor had presented enough evidence to convict Mr. Charach when he rested his case, and would have acquitted Teddy Charach if we had not said or done much of anything else," the lawyer explained.

Ironically, one of the reasons why Charach said he discharged his L.A. County Public Defender was because she wouldn't let him testify on his own behalf at such a trial and told him not to discuss the case with anyone else.

The defense lawyer who did represent Charach at his trial did say, however, that the jurors said they strongly suspected that one of the travel agents whom Charach had claimed sold him forged airline tickets and was called as a defense witness was likely involved in the overall conspiracy.

On this point, however, the police said they didn't believe any of the allegedly unscrupulous travel agents were involved in the conspiracy in question and police didn't suspect them of committing any other crimes.

The defense lawyer also pointed out that he had proven that Charach had not forged any airline tickets himself, but under the law, if the jury found that he knowingly traveled on such forged tickets and had conspired with anyone to obtain them, then the jury has little or no choice but to find him guilty of forgery too.

Following the guilty verdict, Judge Pikard immediately scheduled sentencing for March 8, at which time Charach could receive, according to the pro-

secutor, up to nine years in state prison.

Subsequently, Judge Pikard directed that Charach be placed in Sheriff's custody until he is formally sentenced, unless he posts \$10,000 in bail, which, as of this date of writing, he hasn't.

Meanwhile, this reporter did want to question Charach about his courthouse hallway charges that persons employed by the LAPD, other than the honest and highly-capable Charach-Metzer-Conviser case policeman, had orchestrated a frame-up of him from behind the scenes.

Charach said that elements of the LAPD today framed him in the current airline ticket forgery case in order to "get back at him" and hopefully discredit his "second gun" RFK death data.

Also, one was curious as to what Charach's exact status was at the L.A. County Jail, as we had been told once we got through to someone in the know that Charach was being kept at that time in a medical ward.

When this reporter arrived at the Sheriff's Central Jail on February 10, just before and as the scheduled nighttime visiting hours commenced, I was directed to the special Attorney's and News Media Only interview room reception area.

There, the deputy said that he could not arrange a news media interview for me with Charach or any other inmate "...because pursuant to Unit Order No. 5,04/004, dated 3-20-81, you must have a Sheriff's press pass in order to qualify, but you haven't presented one, and, when asked, say you don't have one."

Earlier, the captain in charge of the Sheriff's Information Bureau (SIB) said he would look into whether or not Charach could receive any visitors at all "...and I'll call you back in 10 minutes."

We had to contact the SIB captain because the Sheriff's regular inmate information number, (213) 680-9600, is almost always suspiciously busy or otherwise malfunctioning.

While the SIB captain never called me back, he did have a woman SIB sergeant call back to tell us that "...Mr. Charach just had a visitor at 3:45 p.m., so you won't be able to see him as a member of the public, since we only allow one visit per prisoner per 24-hour period."

This is the same SIB captain and management hierarchy over him who, relying upon the highly-discriminatory case law of the now-defunct *L.A. Free Press vs. LAPD/LASO*, decided against the *Free Press* in 1970, refuses to issue the LASO press pass to freelance reporters and photographers primarily published in alternative or so-called "un-

derground" newspapers, especially this reporter.

According to the woman SIB sergeant the SIB captain used, in effect, to tell us he was offering us no cooperation in interviewing Charach, an L.A. County Jail inmate who is visited by an attorney or member of the news media carrying an LASO press pass can still be visited by a regular member of the public during that same 24-hour period.

Other curious conduct at the L.A. Central Jail is that a member of the public can't leave mail or messages with the Sheriff's deputies to process to the inmates. Therefore, the public is required to pay U.S. Mail postage in lieu of hand-delivering mail to a central, publicly-accessible point.

The Central Jail staff, which somewhat humiliatingly has the inmates' visitors (mostly blacks) line up outside the main visitors reception area and then allows them inside in groups, refused to let Mr. Charach know I was even there and had attempted to interview him at the Central Jail.

According to Sheriff Block's adjutant, "Whatever the Custody Division people are doing is fine with us, we don't care," and he subsequently hung up on me on February 11.

Certainly, the above is worse under Sheriff Block than it was under Pitchees, whose former chief jailer, Walter Howell, was flexible and often permitted a freelancer to interview a prisoner, though not in the special Attorney's Room, even if the prisoner had already been visited by someone else earlier that day.

Charach's prior problems with the LAPD and later the D.A.'s office began shortly after the RFK assassination when, on July 16, 1968, he was first interviewed by LAPD/SUS detectives at Parker Center and henceforth.

Charach's lawyer said, however, that even if some of the same people who worked on the LAPD's SUS or special investigation of the RFK murder in 1968-69 or later were today supervising the major frauds case against Charach, which the policeman referred to above worked substantially on, he doubted it had anything to do with the facts of this case.

This same defense lawyer also strongly indicated he wouldn't do anything to assist us in attempting to interview or visit Charach at the County Jail unless he was paid to do so.

Otherwise, it should also be noted that the Sheriff's decision to discriminate against the alternative press reporters in automatically denying them LASO press passes, also contributes substantially to the many problems we subsequently have in attempting to cover a trial, including the recent Charach trial.

The fact is, the Sheriff's management does its deputies, as well as the press and general public alike, a disservice by automatically preventing these deputies and other authorities from knowing who all the reporters are coming into contact with these Sheriff's deputies.