

Congressman Don Edwards
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Rt. 12, Frederick, Md. 21701
6/17/78

Dear Congressman Edwards,

When the House assassins committee would not let me see the transcript of the earlier star-chamber testimony of Mrs. Carol Pepper and her brother, John Ray, I went to your office and that of several other Members. From your office to that of Congressman Bauman I encouraged that some staff member be present at the next day's proceedings because it was apparent that these people were determined to rehabilitate Joe McCarthy.

It was also apparent that no Congressional staff member would be permitted inside that star chamber. The reasons for holding these proceedings in secret has nothing to do with the protection of the rights of the innocent. It is only to prevent exposure of what this committee of assassins of our most basic rights is and has been up to.

If you are aware of reports alleging that the CIA has been engaged in undermining this committee through the New York Times and the Washington Post that is utter nonsense. I am the source of those stories and there is no question about the accuracy of either the stories or the information I provided to those reporters.

Bankrupt although financed with the largest appropriation in Congressional history this committee has been seeking anything that can make it appear to be sincere and to have some accomplishment. Having nothing it is trying to will its nightmares into reality.

Its apparent theory is that John Ray had a bank-robbing business in which his housewife sister was the bagwoman and that jointly they financed their brother James, presumed by your committee from the first - without any investigation - to be the assassin. (This presumption is safer than questioning the FBI or tangling with it in any way.)

I have personal knowledge of the initial presumption and it is explicit in the committee's earliest statements, based on which it was financed.

That the theory of the committee's approach cannot be true means nothing to the committee because it is so utterly bankrupt it has nothing else.

Only one bank robbery prior to the King assassination is involved, at ^{Alton} ~~Alton~~, Ill. Others were arrested for it. The FBI, also desperate to explain the source of James Earl Ray's money for the year he was loose, broke its back to find some reason to suspect he was connected with that robbery. It leaked that he was but in fact there was no connection. I have the FBI's records.

The other robberies were after James Earl Ray's arrest. Therefore, they are not only immaterial - they are outside the committee's mandate and outside any legislative purpose.

You need only know the desperate poverty in which John Ray was and has been to know that he got no loot from any bank robbery or any other kind.

If he had not been broken when a bum rap was laid on him because the FBI regarded him as uncooperative he'd never have been convicted and sentenced to 18 years allegedly for driving a switch ear. The actual robbers were either acquitted or in the case of an escapee for only 18 months.

When John Ray would not say what this committee wanted him to say it threatened him - protected by its star chamber secrecy. Then the chairman made an extension of remarks threat. Truth, true to Orwell, was what the committee wanted to hear and nothing else.

Now the committee has gone outside any legislative purpose and outside any proper mandate to pressure the Department of Justice to put John back in jail just as soon as he got a job and the very day before his parole was to become effective.

I conducted the investigation for the James Earl Ray habeas corpus effort. It and Jim Lesar's briefing were successful at the appeals court level. I also conducted the investigation for the two weeks of evidentiary hearing in Memphis in 1974. (The judge held guilt or innocence to be immaterial. He also went against the evidence and even invented some "evidence" to hold the guilty plea was voluntary.) From this one might be led to believe

that I might have some knowledge of the King assassination and official investigations of it. But not by your committee. I had the greatest difficulty forming any evidence on it. I mean evidence in the literal sense.

Finally Mr. Blakely phoned and said he would like to talk to me. I agreed, subject to not being asked to breach the obligations I owe James Earl Ray. Mr. Blakely made a fine speech to me about how as a lawyer he respected this position and how he would take the same position. He said he'd make the date later.

Instead he wrote to tell me that he did not want to discuss the James Earl Ray case with me. I have had no response to my reply, that I had read the committee's mandate to be an investigation not of the Ray case but of the King assassination.

When the committee subpoenaed Mrs. Pepper and John Ray it also refused to let Jim Lesar, the only lawyer with a real knowledge of the case, represent both, alleging Mr. Lesar would have a conflict of interest. As a result the very nervous Mrs. Pepper had forced upon her a lawyer who has a number of income charges pending and who also represented still another witness.

When Mrs. Pepper and John Ray were to appear again Mr. Lesar, who is also my lawyer and with whom I have worked closely on this for years, asked me to go over the transcripts of the prior testimony to see if I could find any errors in it. He assumed, of course, that the committee had a concern about truth or accuracy. What we found is that I could see nothing and that when Mr. Lesar made some notes based on which he would ask questions of his clients he had even the notes confiscated when he left the committee's offices.

Because of my factual knowledge and because of the large number of FBI records I have obtained and have read Mr. Lesar asked me to accompany him when Mrs. Pepper and John Ray testified. After a few sneering remarks about me snickered out by Subcommittee Chairman Fauntroy he forced me out of the hearing room. If the transcript is not corrupted you will find this in it. He even had the record show that he laughed.

I guess by the time one can be a delegate in the Congress he is entitled to any kind of sense of humor, if the word is appropriate.

Even if the result is indistinguishable ^{from} ~~as~~ what we might expect of a KGB or Gestapo proceeding.

The fears you had when this committee was launched on the most incredible fictions are more than justified. They have become the reality and the Congress, by its silence, has perpetuated the Orwellian reality.

Reporting this is no satisfaction to me. Mine was the first book on the Warren Commission and the first if not the only one to hold that the only hope lay in the Congress. (As you may know for some years I've been hoping that there may be some hope in the courts.)

Our rights were not established by charges made against bishops. The defense of the unpopular establishes the rights of all. John Ray is a racist, an anti-Semite. I am a Jew. I have no problem from this and it is immaterial to his rights. I have done all I can and I will do all I can to try to protect his rights. With him other and broader issues are involved. I am not unmindful of them.

The present situation is one in which John Ray and his counsel are denied the transcript of that star-chamber testimony, which has been made available for improper uses against John Ray and under conditions that deny him any defense.

By a man in the employ of the Congress whose concepts of rights include providing an affidavit for Moe Dalitz to use against a publication. By a man who demands a secrecy oath from witnesses and counsel as a precondition for even looking at the transcripts of their own remarks. What a glory to the Congress!

Please excuse the haste with which I write. We have only one mail a day. I believe you are sincere in your concern over rights therefore I seek to inform you, if in haste, as soon as possible. If I can be of any help, please ask.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg