

*Confidential, please.*

7/5/72

MEMO RE PHONE CONVERSATION WITH SYLVIA MEAGHER

Sylvia just phoned. We spoke for over an hour. She began by saying that she had just gotten over serious health problems and wanted to know what has been happening with Wecht. She said for 20 yrs she has been taking prescribed amphetamines, and did not know she was dependent on them. Her doctor died and she began suffering withdrawal symptoms the day after we first spoke about Wecht's access. She said she asked to be hospitalized, but was refused, and got to a point of physical anguish and depression (which accompanies withdrawal from amphetamines) where she had to be cared for by her niece like a baby. Her new doctor is now gradually taking her off the previous prescription, and she is feeling much better, although she may have occasional relapses.

I told her what little had transpired, that Jerry had called and said Wecht was pissed off at everybody and might be speaking to Lifton. She said she had told Cyril the night we spoke that he should call me and call Harold and Bernabei, which was all my advice. She also said she advised against Bob Smith and told Cyril I would not meet with Smith. She said she was shocked that Cyril had called no one and that he was angry. She also told me that Jerry had told her that Lifton told him he met with Cyril for an hour in Pittsburgh before Wecht got access. Wecht had not told her this, even though in another matter she had warned Wecht that Lifton was sick and dishonest. She said that certainly she now has doubts about Cyril, but that we still have to help him with the opportunity he has.

We discussed Jerry a little bit. Sylvia thinks highly of him, but she is aware of his shortcomings. She has always called him a blabbermouth, and she says his judgements, though well-meaning, are usually irresponsible. She said that she had not seen his letter to Harold, but she had seen Gary's and she thought Gary's was very reasonable and well stated. I told her Jerry's letter was transparent, and that I thought Jerry acted reprehensively, was very wrong and that Harold should not be in contact with him anymore. I reserved judgement about Gary.

I restated my position to Sylvia, that I had misgivings, more now about Wecht than about exactly what was to happen after he makes his announcement. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ However, I said, I still felt I had an obligation to speak with Wecht, provided that Harold's material not be mentioned. She said my position was perfectly reasonable.

She admitted that of course the gov't must have some plans to do damage to the whole truth, but that we had this opportunity now and we should make the best of it, and we should prepare Cyril as best we can. I told her I had no illusions about that, that there was really nothing we could do with Cyril to prevent a disaster, and that surely the press has been primed to the irresponsible statements he has made on Nebel. She said she is aware of that, and added she has always tried to stop Cyril from making such statements. She said she has called in on the show to publically correct Wecht, and she writes him detailed letters afterwards pointing out his mistakes. I told her we still couldn't guarantee or hope to save him, and she agreed, but said we have to try. I also told her Cyril shouldn't need to be briefed, for he can read such materials. She said that he needed a backgrounding on certain details to look for. I said I could agree with this on a limited basis, very limited.

She told me that she had received a long letter from Harold, which she was in no condition to read when she got it, but which she read yesterday, when she returned home. She said that the letter rehashed all the old arguments, all the cases where she was wrong and where Harold had been hurt. She said that she wished Harold didn't think she was trying to hurt him, that she has never deliberately or intentionally tried to hurt him, that she really likes

him but finds it hard to get along with him, and that she cannot put his interests above those of the case. She said she wrote him as dispassionate a letter she could, telling him that he misunderstood her criticism, that she does not accuse him of keeping anything from her, she freely said that was her own doing and this was a marked change in her attitude. She had never before been willing to say something on those terms, so I presume Harold's letter had more effect than she would admit. But she said she tried to tell Harold that he was in effect suppressing this info from the public, and whatever his motive, isn't he no better than the FBI and the Archives? She said that no one else she encountered holds confidentiality and credit-first use as high a value as Harold, and she said that since she ~~MM~~ does not share the same values, she has been unwilling to accept confidences from him--that was the only thing she could do to live with herself. She said that if she had gotten the death certificate from him in confidence when he got it, she would have spent the time to the present torn between her obligation to respect the confidence and her obligation to make this available to the public. She said she would have been moved to have Wecht hold a press conference and release it. She said that she understands my moral position on this, with respect to my use of Harold's material, and she respects the choice I have made, although she said this is something she could not do.

She also begged off on some of the things she had told me about Harold's trip to the West coast with the Liebler debate. She said she has no direct knowledge of that, she only saw a tape of the debate itself on TV and she shrivelled when she saw Harold's performance, that he pressed the issue of the Altgens pictures until Liebler "mopped the floor with Harold." I told her Harold's position on this, and said that Harold admits this was his worst performance, but that he had a reason for belaboring that point.

She said she could not understand why Harold felt she had such bad motives with respect to him, that she had tried to hurt him. She said she reviewed his book when she was asked to, which was only once or twice. I told her that Harold's big bone was her dating of his work and Epsteinds. She told me that she had a bound copy of Inquest before she got one of WW. I reminded her of the dates of publication and she said that this was right, that according to the dates of publication, WW was published first. I said that was all that mattered, that it made no difference which she had first. She said that she made an error and she was sorry if this hurt Harold. She then admitted to me that Harold had pointed this out to her while ~~XXXXXX~~ her book was still in proofs and that she "forgot" to correct it. So, she admitted that she made this error, but she said she cannot understand how Harold could think she did it to hurt him. I suggested perhaps Harold thinks she did it out of a preference for Epstein. She said that was not true. I did not press the point, for it was significant to me that she admitted the error and her failure to correct it. What more could I say?

She said that she is sure people have hurt Harold in countless cases, sometimes intentionally and with malice, other times without meaning to or as a result of circumstances which appear differently at a later time. She said that Harold seems to interpret everything as willful actions against him. I told her that with so many having such apparently strong opinions against Harold's methods and often acting against Harold's interests, how else could he think?

She said she wanted to call Wecht and find out his side of the story. She would not pump him, she said, but she wanted to know why he felt like he does. She admitted that she has no illusions about him, and that she is sure there will be much dirty-work by the gov't, but that we have to do what we can to work against the dirty-work.

There was a marked change in her compared to the last time we spoke, also compared to some of her previous statements and attitudes about Harold. I am sure Harold's letter had an effect on her. She was very reasonable, and did not fly off the ~~MM~~ handle when we disagreed. She was far more open to argument,

more realistic, and some of her attitudes and positions had changed, most notably with respect to Harold.

One further note, which I just remembered. I told Sylvia that my fears with respect to Cyril ~~XXXX~~ screwing this up and the press tearing him apart were more tangible to me than my fears of the gov't further raping truth and setting us back. She said that this was very reasonable to her, and that she could understand that whereas she could not understand my preoccupation with whether the Kennedys would get the blame. Here I spoke firmly with her. I told her that whatever her attitude toward the Kennedys, and whatever the moral position of the family, the fact was they did not suppress this stuff during the existence of the WC. That is the TRUTH. She said this was still not clear to her, that I had before directed her to the Secret Service statement at the end of what was formerly PM III, but that the copy of it she had did not have any documents. I told her that these materials were not denied the WC. She said that she remembered now in the Exec. Sessions where Warren spoke of getting them, but this was hazy. I told her that the SS has stated publicly the X-rays were used to brief the staff, and that Specter, as she knew, admitted seeing a picture of the back. She said she always thought Specter was lying about that. I told her he was not, that he had told me a Secret Service agent showed this to him. I also told her that I recently discovered that Jacob Cohen had printed this info about the SS statement in 1966, independently and quite before Harold in PM. I told her that there was much more on this that Harold had been told by the SS, but that I was pledged to a confidence on this and it was a confidence I would respect. She said I should keep the confidence but that she was absolutely shocked to learn that the staff had seen these things. She exclaimed, "Then Specter knows the whole score!" I said that was what I was trying to tell her all along. She said that does change things, but that she still felt Cyril should see this pix and X-rays and somehow, the public should be informed that the Kennedys did not suppress this material. I told her this had been my thinking, but I did not know how it could be done, and that I would not divulge Harold's material or be party to the divulgence of it. I did stop her short on the Kennedys, and I'm sure her attitude is changed now. She said that she genuinely was not aware before tonight that this material was really in the hands of the Commission, that the Kennedys really did not suppress it then. I also asked her how much of this did she think the Kennedys were aware of, look at the people they trust and who advise them. She agreed, and lashed into Marshall. So, I think her thinking is changing, at least in some respects and away from some of the limitations of the past.

Also, she gave me the line again that Cyril has taken great professional risks in all he has done on this. I asked her if he wasn't elected head of the Academy of forensic sciences after he published his criticisms, and she said yes, but that Fisher has been making life miserable for Cyril in Cyril's efforts to reform local coroner systems. I told her that this has been a boon to Wecht's private mal-practice cases, and she said she wasn't aware that he handled such cases, that he never told her that. I told her I was sure he did, and that his stand on the assass could only attract cases to him, so perhaps the sacrifice is not all as great as she imagined. She had no response, which is a far cry from her usual ardent defense of Cyril and the nobility of his motives.

She actually stopped defending Cyril on the basis of his motives, and said we should work together to help him in the interest of the case. ~~XXXXXX~~ She indicated for the first time suspicions about his motives, but I can't say for sure if she was just playing her cards to avoid antagonizing me or if she really has doubts. I'm inclined to think she has doubts.

Howard Roffman