

Sylvia

cc: Mollinoff 3/30/67

March 30, 1967

Mr. Pierre Salinger

San Francisco, California 94100

Plucky Pierre:

You made a mistake not to stick to the 50-mile marches. There your performance was brilliant, compared to what you ultimately will have done to yourself in writing a foreword (and endorsement) for Charles Roberts, the literary lickspittle, and his pot-boiler which can be called a "book" only from its form and in your continuing associations and promotions of it.

There is a lemming-like compulsion that characterized the work of the Warren Commission. It rubs off. Roberts rolled in it. You are coated, too.

Perhaps the worst part of this dishonest venture engaged in by all of you who persist in talking loudly about what you know nothing about is that if you succeed you will have made indefensible what and who you pretend to defend. In your case and Roberts', you insist upon denying the writers with whom you do not agree the rights you pretend are those of all writers, those essential to a democratic society.

In Roberts' case this is more understandable. His drivel, whether or not it succeeds, is pleasing to those with whom he now associates, to those who are prime news sources for him. He has an ass to lick. But you?

And where does either one of you get off saying there is something wrong in writers getting paid? The press says you got \$500,000.00 plus collateral rights for your book, which you could and did write only because President Kennedy was murdered. Has Roberts tossed off his degrading triviality not for pay? I tell you frankly I have yet to get a cent from my work, have yet to pay my way out of debt on it. As of the end of last year, my wife and I had more than 20,000 hours, aside from borrowed cash, in it. Is this a subject I as a writer should not assess? Or is it one in which I should ignore the result of this tremendous research, greater than any member either of the Warren Commission or its staff invested, to satisfy ignorance and blind preconceptions such as yours?

I know what I write and speak of, as you do not and as Roberts now knows he does not. Witness his silence when I challenged him to debate me in any forum of his selection. I would appreciate it very

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much if you could use your good offices at the National Press Club to arrange such a dialogue. Despite your outrageous betrayal of all the responsibilities and obligations of an American writer, I would welcome you as the moderator, and I will not pluck Pierre. I will debate my book or his, the work of the Commission, its Report, or any combination of his choosing.

If this is too tough for one who knows as little of what he writes as Roberts, I will make it easier. We will restrict ourselves to his book. Certainly, having written it, he is the world's outstanding expert on it. Let us have a dialogue on this vital subject. Let us begin with establishing the personal integrity of writers, by laying bare their motives and by giving Roberts an opportunity to earn a sensational press for his book. It will do my work little good, for it is widely suppressed. But it may open some eyes and minds.

This should make you happy, for it is consistent with the only legitimate objective you can have in writing such an uninformed and libelous "foreword" to a book you could not have read. Its March contents were not available to your Siamese February writing.

Roberts is explicit in his writing as he is in his speech: He wants to deny a free press to those who do not agree with him, and he says so. You are sneaky. What you say, without naming names, is that some of us are deficient scholars and others are "persons with a desire for notoriety or money" or who "clearly have to be labeled as psychotic". Certainly as a writer and publicist, you never wrote such words about other writers without having familiarized yourself with what you wrote about. May I, therefore, ask you to specify in which category you place me and on what basis?

I sat next to this man whose work you endorse, and for whom you express personal admiration, for four hours in the studios of WOR in New York. His conspicuous display of ignorance was equaled in my experience only by that of that other altruistic, high-principled, pretended defender of the Commission, Louis Nizer. Each of these eminences, after three years of silence, suddenly felt the overwhelming urge to defend the undefended Commission and its Report, as though there had ever been anything else in the press, at precisely the time he had a book to sell. I invite you to get the tape from WOR or from the commercial sources from which it is available and hear for yourself the plea of the writer you so admire for a return of McCarthyism, for writers. It would be simpler if you were to ask Leo Sauvage, distinguished correspondent of Le Figaro, who was with me and whose quiet response was brilliant and devastating.

This is the company you keep, this the man you admire - a yellow-bellied, dishonest and dishonorable, ignorant lickspittle (and we can add this to what we debate, if you'd like).

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Honorably motivated public relations counsellors with serious clients generally tell them not to talk about what they do not know about. Can you give yourself better advice? How can you, as you have consistently done, address a subject so important, one that goes to the foundation of our institutions, on the basis of ignorance?

When you were selling your own book, I heard you invoke the name of Senator Robert Kennedy as that of an endorser of the "solution" of the assassination. It is my understanding that he dissociated himself from the investigation and has not read a word of the Report. I have devoted hours of radio and TV time to defending him for it and explaining that, in so doing, he subordinated personal desires to serve the national interest.

It is because he was the man in charge, I heard you say, that you trust the investigation and solution. Yet he was not, as you knew or should have known.

How much of a friend are you to him in saying this when it is false, and when, ultimately as it will, this entire sordid thing comes to pieces? Do you want to make him pay this additional price, suffer this much more, be blamed personally for an inadequate investigation and fraudulent "solution" to his brother's murder?

You have shamed yourself. You defame an honorable - or at least a once-honorable - calling, less so since you and Roberts and your irresponsible ilk started practicing it; a craft essential to a democratic society. Are you proud of libeling those who assume the responsibilities that you shunned, the responsibilities of a writer in a democratic society, while you loll in the wealth and fame John F. Kennedy earned for you? How you repay him!

Why do you assault writers who are true to their tradition? Why do you seek to put the whores in the pulpit?

Why, Plucky Pierre, when you have read not a word about what you write?

Why, when you are ignorant and know nothing about what you write?

Why, when you are too fat in the head and lazy in the body to find out?

WHY?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg