

25 September 1971

Dear Harold:

This replies partly to yours of Sept. 19, partly to earlier letters, the last of which was dated Supt. 16.

I just called Mark, the technician at Accurate TV, and asked him your question about using two mikes wired parallel with your little tape recorder. He of course asked what kind of mikes, and I said I could not be sure, but suggested he consider in theory two Sony mikes such as those furnished with earlier small Sony recorders which didn't have built-in mikes. He said he was very dubious, that even with identical mikes it might be necessary to use a mixer, and that he personally wouldn't even try with without some experimentation beforehand. He explained that the signal generated by a hand mike is so small that its behavior is unpredictable in any circumstances other than those for which it's designed to be used. So it looks like your idea of a taking two recorders along is probably the best best. Another possibility might be to use the hand mike we sent you (which automatically disconnects the built-in mike when it's plugged in) and -- unless you're taking notes at the same time -- be generous in the way you swing it back and forth from your question to the subject's reply. At close range that should be a very sensitive and faithful mike, and if you can swing it close to the subject in time for his reply you should miss nothing that isn't overridden by background noises.

I hope in this and in other notes which may be included herein to bring ourselves up to date with you. Yesterday morning I got back at 8:30 a.m. from the last morning on the graveyard shift. We never had been able to sleep much more than four hours at a time up to the hot weather, and during that spell the periods of sleep sank to about two hours, ~~xxxxxxx~~ frequently followed by long periods of wakefulness, after which when we did get to sleep, time was running out and we had to get up half-dead and prepare dinner and try to eat it before I went to work. It got to the point where we could scarcely stand the sight of food, yet both were gaining weight. Well, when I got home yesterday morning, we had the little portion of food we could stand the thought of -- some cereal and a cup of tea -- and then went out to do the shopping for the coming week. Also some other errands, including one which took us clear to San Rafael where we had a small triumph -- Jenifer found a kind of temporary file which just suited one of her more exasperating filing needs. By this time, to our utter astonishment, we found ourselves feeling hungry for the first time we could remember in eight weeks. We went to a good roadside restaurant where breakfast is always passable, anyway, and found ourselves actually eating with pleasure. We finished the shopping and got home, put the groceries and everything away and fell into bed, Jenifer having had three hours sleep during the previous 24 and I perhaps five -- at 2 p.m. We slept 10 hours straight without a break, awoke famished, had some poached eggs and toast and tea, then fell into bed for another four hours before we ~~awoke~~ awoke, bright and shipper, shortly before dawn this morning. Appetite good all day, eating everything in sight and enjoying it; looks like the worst is over.

This afternoon we spent most of the time going over your accumulated unanswered letters -- unanswered in one particular or another (the most urgent has been taken care of earlier) -- and read ALL of them, except for the clippings. These will be taken care of next, and if there are any which need to be returned to you that will be done.

All your enclosures are interesting, and we are grateful to have them, but most of them need no comment from us, which is no indication of our interest. Your letters to Wicker, the people on the Washington Post, to the NBC wheel, all are remarkable in their targeting and effectiveness. We are much interested in your correspondence with Ray, and Jenifer had what I thought was a most apt comment on the latest when she said, "That's a good letter for a man in prison to get."

Now let me take up a few specific points. At various times you have referred in a not very specific way to some important evidentiary material you have uncovered which needs some financing to obtain in usable form. I'm not sure whether you have obtained none of this financing, part, or all of it, your references being none too specific and, at times apparently somewhat contradictory. In any case, we have the impression that what is involved may be some color pictures, which will be expensive. Considering whom you are trying to pry these out of, we have a certain partisan interest in this project and would like to be of some help if we could. Could you say how much is needed? We have no idea, but would like to help. Would you give us this pleasure? You can be sure we would not offer more than we could reasonably afford, and bear in mind that we would not bring up this question if we were not seriously interested in doing something to help.

Re Mel Belli: I believe he is used at times, but only as a hired man. Mostly, he's a bag of wind, as you must know. But there have been two or three occasions apart from his defense of Jack Ruby which suggest he is available for odd jobs and is used at times. One was his defense of the Warren Report in a so-called debate with Lane here, "moderated" by Jake Ehrlich, Belli's aging predecessor here as the community's most flamboyant criminal defense lawyer. Ehrlich was rather pitiful, senile and ignorant of his subject, and was almost laughed off the stage when he asked what he considered a dynamite-laden question: What about the chicken bones? A roar of laughter greeted that. Belli was almost as bad, winding up with only one argument: If you can't trust the FBI whom CAN you trust? That too, got a laugh. Lane had an easy time of it.

On another occasion when Garrison was building his "case" Belli had him as a house guest here, it was reported, and soon after that came up with a taxi driver whom he claimed had told him about driving Jack Ruby in from the airport here at some time when Ruby was supposed to have said something ostensibly interesting about what was going to happen in Dallas. I talked to Belli myself on that story, got absolutely nothing usable, and never even bothered to look up the cabbie, whose address and phone number Belli gave me, simply because the whole story stank of fabrication and red herring.

Belli backed off very quickly and became astonishingly vague when I asked him a few perfectly reasonable questions which unavoidably showed I took a detached view of the official story. Basically, he's a dreadful ham, a show-off, rather juvenile in many ways, but he does understand semantics and is not as stupid as he often pretends.

Your remarks about Lil's mother and her attitude toward doctors amused us very much, partly because it's an exact ~~aktizndmzsz~~ duplicate of my own father's attitude. You described it very well -- that attitude that it was up to the doctor to find out what was wrong. My father was an otherwise intelligent and reasonable guy in most ways -- a Missouri farmer with 120 acres on which he grew diversified crops such as wheat, oats, corn, timothy hay, clover, alfalfa, ~~sp~~ popcorn, sorghum, beef cattle, pigs and chickens. He was the first generation that wasn't frontier-bred, the first to drive a motorcar, but never got around to owning a ~~kratz~~ tractor, which was beyond him in terms of the capital needed. He was keenly interested in education, being largely self-educated himself, and for many years was the pillar of the local school board, overseeing the design and construction of two high schools, interviewing teachers personally, and so on. My younger brother died of diabetes at 16 in 1930, and that may have prejudiced himself against the pretensions of the medical profession somewhat, but I think his attitude toward doctors was a folk attitude that he picked up from his family during his own childhood -- and his family were all frontier people, or had been, in Missouri and before that in Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia going back in time. In any case, he sold out and retired in 1936 and came out here with my mother to live near my ~~sister~~ sister, the only other surviving child, near Napa. He worked for my brother-in-law, who runs a cattle feeding ranch near Napa, for several years, until he retired again at around 75, by which time he had developed some mysterious ailment resembling dropsy and which finally did him in in 1954.

I'm not sure how much of his attitude was due simply to having another man with specialized knowledge, like a doctor, tell him what he must and must not do. I think something of the old frontier independence could have been at work, as it might be in the case of Lil's mother. In any case, I didn't envy his doctor, who wasn't very impressive, as it happened. I think we have to remember that these people grew up in a time when it was a major disaster if anyone had to go to the hospital, that more often than not they went there to die, much as old people now go to a rest home to die. Doctors and hospitals were considerably less effective in those days, and there was the time factor which meant they often didn't get a patient until it was too late anyway. Until I was grown, our family physician was an old bumbler who prescribed castor oil for everything. Even when my brother broke an arm, he prescribed castor oil after setting the bone. After all, what harm could it do? Might even do some good if shock is constipating.

There were two other doctors in that small town of 1,000 where I grew up. One was killing himself and his grown son with morphine addiction (even in the 1920s) and the other was the doc my parents called in after the castor-oil specialist had retired and I came down with typhoid fever at 18. He saved my life (with the unflagging help of my mother) and pulled me through after three weeks of fever. He also took the time to sit and talk to a curious youngster to whom he gave a glimpse of what a real doctor does and why he does it.

But my father never got in on these conversations, being always out in the field or otherwise at work, so he probably never knew a doctor as a person, only as an authority figure in whom he had no great reason to repose much confidence.

I think he, and Lil's mother represent a society now mostly vanished which is very alien to your urban and European background. These people took the fiercest pride in doing everything for themselves. It was something of a disgrace to have to buy vegetables at a grocery store, assuming any worth buying were available. We always had an enormous vegetable garden, a grape arbor, an orchard with apples, peaches, pears, and cherries, and my God the canning that went on. We always butchered one or two pigs every fall and salted down everything that could be salted and smoked. I can still smell the smokehouse, and still recall the instant recognition the one time I've smelled one since -- at Mt. Vernon. My father fixed his own machinery and nearly always his car, and he once built a truck out of an old Hupmobile. He was an ardent country fiddler and taught himself enough music that he led the town band for years and even essayed a string ensemble that ventured into Mozart -- this was partly at the prodding of a furriner, a Polish immigrant farmer. Poppy also was pretty good on the five-stringed banjo and the guitar, and regarded with great pity my efforts on the ukelele after flunking on piano, violin, trumpet and saxophone -- all of which he insisted I take lessons on but which I never got anywhere with because of some peculiar block between symbol recognition and execution. I could memorize and play, but that was it. One other thing about my father -- He was an Ozark fox hunter, the kind that takes his dogs out at night with a lot of friends and their dogs and they all sit on a hill somewhere, build a fire and smoke and probably drink and gossip while their hounds pick up a fox or coyote scent and burst into the glorious music of the chase. This is really an incredible hillbilly sport, where the dog owners can recognize the yap of their individual dog miles away, tell who is leading the pack, which one has got his leg caught in a woven wire fence, and otherwise divine the most remarkable conclusions. No one ever catches a fox or coyote, of course. These animals know what they're doing and apparently enjoy leading the hounds up creeks and otherwise humiliating them. The greatest disaster is if something should happen to the fox. That would ruin everything. I went on a few of these nocturnal expeditions, heard my share of that glorious music, and realized that I was indeed of a different generation. My talents ran more to the Charleston at the time, I fear.

Poppy also was something of a crack shot with a shotgun, and his skill kept us in meat during lean years when our smoked ham and shoulder would give out during the winter and he would fare forth for quail and duck and always come back with something. He was also the kind of a guy who would drive 100 miles to Kansas City to hear a symphony when he could afford it, over dirt roads with several flat tires figured into the trip, and during the early 20s even had a brief fling with the Ku Klux Klan during a wave of anti-jewish propaganda which he soon became disillusioned with and never mentioned again as long as he lived. In short, he was not the type to shell out hard-earned money to pay a doctor to tell him what to do, and I suspect Lil's mother had exactly the same approach to life, including an infinite capacity for boiled poke greens with vinegar.

Well, back to the Cold War. I agree with you that someone made a very important decision when FDR dumped Wallace and chose Truman, and for the same reasons you suggest. I'm not sure it was FDR, except in the pragmatic sense that he realized that Wallace was not going to help him get re-elected. Rather I would look more toward people like Baruch who represented the eastern financial establishment who I think actually made the decision that, as you say, turned the world in another direction for decades. I've always been suspicious about FDR's stroke, and particularly so since the series of mysterious and fortuitous heart attacks and strokes which blossomed after JFK. During that later period I had to postulate that maybe there is some sort of heart attack or embolism-producing drug that can be administered in one way or another. I include such cases as Kefauver, Sen. Clair Engle, and Adlai Stevenson. If this is paranoia, make the most of it.

But as for that important decision, and as to who arranged for Churchill's speech, I know of no record of any of it. I dare say we're not intended to know.

In your letter of 9/12/71, a sort of memorandum to yourself on Khrushchev, you raise interesting points with which I certainly don't disagree, but which I view from a slightly different perspective because of the Chinese factor.

It may be true, as you say, that Khrushchev's declaration of true communism in 20 years may have been an important contributing factor in his decision to place missiles in Cuba, but I believe other things were probably more weighty.

As I see it, Khrushchev's most immediate problem was to liquidate the ruins of Stalinism. Let's start by defining Stalinism, the end product of Lenin's converting Marxism into a dynamic for international subversion based on party discipline and backed up by funds from the three Internationals. Stalin in turn changed all this into a drive to use communism in other countries to support development of "socialism in one country -- Russia" and to shore up that process internally by grafting the techniques of the church to the Communist Party in Russia. I mean by that the confessional -- self-criticism, and the tool of denunciation, criticism. Remember that Stalin was educated for the priesthood. In fact, never forget it. Because he also borrowed another device from the church -- the legend of infallibility, and by the time he died it had, of course, ruined him.

Tito defied him first in public, but of course the Chinese had defied him long before that. It just hadn't been made public. As a matter of fact, it was the Chinese who in 1948 first denounced Tito as a heretic to the glorious leader Stalin and thereby put Stalin at such a disadvantage that he not only had to sign a mutual defense treaty with the Chinese in 1950 and lend them some dough, he also had to agree to give back all the stuff he had looted in Manchuria. It was humiliating enough to have the Tito heresy made public, especially by the Chinese, because it shattered the illusion of the world solidarity of Communism and the infallible authority of Moscow. It was even more so to have to PAY these Chinese upstarts in the bargain,

Khrushchev's problem, then, was to move on to something else that would look more attractive to the Russian people and have some plausibility abroad. It was manifestly impossible to continue pretending that no matter what ~~KHAKK~~ Moscow said, the rest of the Communist World would do it without question.

I was beginning to try to sort all this out in my head in 1949 when I was in China again briefly. ~~xxxx~~ It was the ~~xxxx~~ Indian ambassador, Sardar K.M. Pannikar, who supplied the key: "If you want to understand the international nature of Communism," he said, "study the early history of the church. Peking is the new Byzantium."

Since Stalin had come to terms, however unwillingly, with his new Chinese allies, Khrushchev was able to turn away from that problem for a while, anyway, and try to get other things going. (He may have made a mistake, because it was in 1960 that the Russians withdrew their entire technical staff from ~~China~~ China because of widening differences arising with the Chinese).

What Khrushchev got going was, internally, a thaw from the rigidities of Stalinism along with more consumer goods and a great new emphasis on increasing food production and the opening up of new lands, and, externally, the abandonment of Stalin's hard line in favor of co-existence. I agree that the nuclear capability situation played a part here, but am not sure that something of the sort would not have been necessary anyway both at home and abroad. The Russians were damned fed up with Stalin, as we know, and in 1948 the Berlin airlift had proved that it was going to take more than Russian was prepared to pay at that time to make Stalinism work ahead.

As to whether the Chinese are moving toward a lessening of tensions with the west because of the same nuclear factor, I am not at all sure. It may play a part, but not necessarily a decisive one. My belief is that they do not now fear a nuclear attack from this country, assuming no accidents or other unforeseeable developments. They know the American posture has to be shrunk in the Western Pacific if only for domestic American reasons, and are determined to have a voice in what develops from this situation. They also are obviously concerned about the buildup of Soviet troops on their border, and know better than we how paranoia works in Russia. And above all, they know recent American history and know that Richard Nixon is precisely the man, and probably the only man, with whom a detente with the United States can be reached. He helped create the estrangement, did as much as anyone to preserve it and prevent anyone else from doing anything about it, and therefore is the one man who might be used to lessen it with ~~xxxx~~ a minimum danger of being assassinated for it.

Now, back to Khrushchev. While he was doing all this pulling back from Stalin's hard line, he still had the problem of preserving Soviet prestige among other communist countries. I think that even if his right wing military didn't pressure him -- and we don't know whether they did or not -- he probably felt compelled to take the fateful step with Cuba, partly because it was a small island where the situation could be reasonably contained (missiles in China could not be contained: the Chinese are too independent and were too hot to get at Chiang on Taiwan, and the Russians refused to give them missiles in that situation) and where also there was also maximum propaganda potential because of Cuba's proximity to the United States and its value as a stepping stone to the rest of Latin America.

In this connection, when Khrushchev died, a local commentator, William Mandel (born in Russia and made his living for years doing translations from the Russian after the House Un-American Activities Committee ruined his career) did a whole bit on why the Russians shrugged it off and didn't even bury him in the Kremlin wall.. Mandel made the point that this was pretty shabby treatment for a man who had picked up the shambles left by Stalin, given the Russians more freedom than they ever had had before along with more consumer goods, all the while calming the international waters with his new policy of co-existence which at least gave them some hope of peace. He then made an extremely interesting and amusing comment as to why the Russians acted in this particular way. He said that in the Cuban missile crisis, the majority of Russians actually were in sympathy with JFK, that they "saw JFK as the prince in Swan Lake while old-shoe Khrushchev ~~zanzanz~~ reminded them only of themselves."

I can believe this. It's an entirely new idea, but I find it quite acceptable on the basis of the Soviet Russians I've known, who are indistinguishable from the far more numerous non-communist Russians I've known. They're all the epitome of the bourgeois, except for the most rare individuals. There is absolutely no difference between them in this respect. After all Khrushchev was a peasant, a shepherd boy, a miner, a party wheel, but still a man who started as a peasant. And I think the Swan Lake prince image gets right at the romantic Russian solar plexus. Several years ago we saw a Soviet movie about a Red Army gal who was a guerrilla sharpshooter during the Allied-supported Kolchak counter-rebellion. She was an apple-cheeked, husky peasant girl, and she got seduced by a slimy Czarist White Guardsman, and the moralizing that came out of all this was just what you'd expect, including the agony our heroine suffered as she drew a bead on her lover and mowed him down when he tried to escape. But you know, he was quite the handsomest, most polished man I've ever seen on the screen, the epitome of desirable manhood. It was just that he was on the wrong side. These people are incorrigibly bourgeois.

Jenifer has been doing some digging on your behalf and will have other things to include here. Anyway, let's hope this cleans us up to date and that we can keep more abreast of things from now on.

All the best,

jdw