

HOOVER PRESSED ON PLOT CHARGES

Legislator Defends Priests
Accused by F.B.I. Chief

By FRED P. GRAHAM

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30—A Tennessee Congressman, who visited the Rev. Daniel Berrigan and the Rev. Phillip F. Berrigan three times in prison after reading their antiwar writing, demanded today that J. Edgar Hoover prove or retract his charges that they are part of a kidnapping and sabotage plot.

Representative William R. Anderson, a Democrat, said in a letter to Mr. Hoover that "if there is any substance to your allegations," the Berrigans should be indicted. If not, Mr. Anderson added, "we should expect an explanation if not an outright retraction."

In testimony before a Senate appropriations subcommittee last Friday, Mr. Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, charged that the Berrigan brothers were leaders of a militant group called the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives. He said the group was plotting to kidnap a high Government official, or to blow up installations here to bring pressure against United States bombing in Southeast Asia.

Surprise to Mitchell

A spokesman for Attorney General John N. Mitchell said today that Mr. Mitchell did not know in advance of Mr. Hoover's testimony that he was going to make the allegations.

In a related development, six members of the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives said at a news conference here that the Berrigans had never belonged to their group, and that it had never considered kidnapping anyone or sabotaging anything.

Representative Anderson is a former Navy captain who gained national attention in 1958, when he was skipper of the Nautilus, the first submarine to sail under the North Pole. He has represented a rural district in middle Tennessee since 1964.

The Congressman said in an interview that, after reading the writings of the Berrigan brothers, he visited them on two oc-

casions at the Federal prison in Danbury, Conn., where they are serving sentences for destroying draft records in Cambridge, Md., in 1968.

Returned Yesterday

Because of his acquaintance with them and what he termed their "philosophy of total non-violence," Representative Anderson said he "simply could not believe Mr. Hoover's allegations" because such tactics would "contradict their fundamental beliefs." So he returned to the prison yesterday to talk to the Berrigans about the charges.

At the news conference today, the spokesman for the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives said that the group had only 11 members, but that its grandiose name might have led the F.B.I. to believe that it was an umbrella group for many antiwar groups that operate on the East Coast.

The six members at the news conference included three priests—the Rev. Peter Ford of Woodstock, Md., the Rev. Joseph R. Wenderoth of Baltimore and the Rev. Richard Bidwell of Boston — and two nuns—Susan Cordes of Grand Rapids, Mich., and Susan Davis of Baltimore. The sixth member was John Finnegan of Philadelphia, a former student at Pennsylvania State University.

'Liberated' Records

The said that the group had not been active since last February, when the members files in Philadelphia and records of the General Electric Company in Washington. No indictments have resulted from those incidents.

Father Ford contended that Mr. Hoover's testimony was an attempt to "create an atmosphere of distrust and terror" and to persuade the public that all groups that opposed the status quo were "subversives and careless of human life." A statement distributed by the group said that the F.B.I. also wished to "instill in us and others a paralyzing fear."

Sister Susan Davis added that Mr. Hoover might have retaliated against the Berrigans because Daniel Berrigan had dimmed the F.B.I.'s "super-cop" image by evading capture for four months last summer.

Spokesmen for the F.B.I. declined to comment.

A suit against Mr. Hoover for defamation of character is being considered by the group, Sister Susan said.