

Letters From Berrigan Case

Following are excerpts from letters contained in new Government indictments against the Rev. Philip F. Berrigan and others. According to the indictment, the first letter is from Sister Elizabeth McAlister to Father Berrigan, in prison in Lewisburg, Pa., and was sent about Aug. 20, 1970. The second letter was allegedly transmitted from Father Berrigan to an address in New York on Aug. 22, 1970.

McAlister Letter

"... which leads me to the #3 & this is in utter confidence & should not be committed to paper & I would want you not even to say a word of it to Dan until we have a fuller grasp of it. I say it to you for 2 reasons. The first obviously is to get your thinking on it, the second to give you some confidence that people are thinking seriously of escalating resistance.

Eq called us up to Conn. last night along with Bill Davidson who, in case people have not told you, has become one of our better people. Parenthetically someone with a knowledge of the scene, a keen sense for tactic & detail & little fear of risk for himself. He's the most central fig. in Phila. scene & went into the Boards in Georgetown with those kids.

Eq outlined a plan for an action which would say—escalated seriousness—and we discussed pros & cons for several hours. It needs much more thought & careful selection of personnel. To kidnap—in our terminology make a citizen's arrest of—someone like Henry Kissinger. Him because of his influence as policy maker yet sans Cabinet status, he would therefore not be as much protected as one of the bigger wigs; he is a bachelor which would mean if he were so guarded, he would be anxious to have unguarded moments where he could carry on his private affairs.

... To issue a set of demands, e.g. cessation of the use of B52s over N. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, & release of political prisoners, Hold him for about a week during which time big wigs of the liberal ilk would be brought to him—also kidnapped if necessary (which, for the most part it would be)—& hold a trial or grand jury affair out of which an indictment would be brought.

There is no pretense of these demands being met & he would be released after this time with a word that



Sister Elizabeth McAlister
Associated Press

we're non-violent as opposed to you who would let a man be killed—one of your own—so that you can go on killing.

The liberals would also be released as would a film of the whole proceedings in which, hopefully, he would be far more honest than he is on his own territory. The impact of such a thing would be phenomenal.

Reasons for wanting to do it: it will ultimately be done by someone here & end in fiasco or violence & killing. Eq. wants to do it & do it well before anyone else does it badly & I believe he has the knowhow to direct such an escapade.

The major problem, as I see it, is the severe consequences for something that is largely 'drama' with little lasting effect. Second problem I envision is position of something like this in a movement context i.e. what next. Some thought would have to be given to that.

It seems at least possible to have 2 fairly distinct groups on the one hand the felons who have a scant chance but a chance of remaining anonymous & the big wigs who will provide the 'public' aspect of the action who are preserved by their own position as 'captives' also.

The concept of a film of the trial to be released to TV etc. is phenomenal. Then, his aspect of the war will be at least impeded by his absence & the involvement of all close to him in an investigation of his whereabouts. Think about it & maybe when I see you in Danbury I can get your thoughts as

well as fill you in on where the plan lies."

Berrigan Letter

"Now we come to the #3. Just between you and me, I have never been over much impressed w/Eq. He's dear friend, very helpful in the last months, lovely guy, good ideologue, but still to produce. I think the role of a man from Missouri is the safest one with him. (I have this terrible suspicion regarding academics).

With few exceptions, the b-stards will let others go to the gallows without a serious murmur. They did it in Germany and they're doing it here. And E is from that strain. You see love, the believe isn't there... but these are mere reservations—I'd be delighted to be wrong.

"About the plan—the first time opens the door to murder—the Tupamaros are finding that out in Uruguay—I hope you're following them... when I refer to murder it is not to prohibit it absolutely (violence against non-violence bag) it is merely to observe that one has set the precedent, and that later on, when gov't resistance to this sort of thing stiffens, men will be killed.

More to the point, the project as you outlined it is brilliant—but grandiose. I've found, with bitter experience, that when people opt for too much, they're either stupid or egotistical (another red light about friend E). Which is to say that grabbing the gentleman will take a force of perhaps 10 of your best people—guarding him—getting communications out, perhaps moving him 2 or 3 times within a week.

Now, in addition, to grab a prosecution of liberals would take dozens more, making the network too wide. But even if that were possible, how can it be guaranteed that they would indict him in any sort of real fashion? Then too the common view is that K is the architect of honorable withdrawal from S. E. Asia, and even some of the liberals believe that. How to get the truth out, ie that the economy needs war, and it mind as well be there as elsewhere, and that we intend to stay.

That might mean a Korean type answer, but then we'd have to hot it up elsewhere. Or go into the dilemma of more serious recession, rising unemployment at home. This is what should be gotten from K, but can the liberals do it?

"Nonetheless, I like the

plan and am just trying to weave elements of modesty into it. Why not coordinate it with the one against capital utilities?—You should talk more thoroughly with the 'charge' about this, or with Little Shane or Big Joe German. To disrupt them, and then grab the Brain Child—this would be escalation enough.

"This come off the top of my head. Why not grab the Brain Child, treat him decently, but tell him nothing of his fate—or tell him his fate hinges on release of pol, people or cessation of air strikes in Laos. Then have batteries of movement people—Brain Child blindfolded—engage him on policy.

After he has been taught (the consideration of his safety will make him more and more human in his answers) get it filmed and recorded. One thing should be implanted in that pea brain—that respectable murderers like himself are no longer inviolable. (This should be done just before release). And if he doesn't work to humanize policy, the likes of him will be killed by less scrupulous people.

Finally, that political prisoners are the best guarantee of his sweet skin's safety, and that he better get them out of jail.

"Taken along these lines, you have both a material and personal confrontation with the warmakers. The trick to pull off is to hit them very, very hard without giving them violence to react to, or justify themselves with.

"He can be kept blindfolded, the participants can wear stocking masks and disguise their voices. It can be done brilliantly.

"I would sic EQ on it immediately, but tie it in with the D. C. fiasco, and keep his imagination under ropes. If the investment in our best people is excessive, and if they're taught—there'd be a massive manhunt—it would mean life. And this is a factor to be considered.

"Grabbing our angel would involve 2 or 3 mos. discreet work. I would imagine that he would have devices in his car to call for police assistance at the slightest danger. The thing to do is to find out where he goes for weekends.

"I don't think E can build his own team on this—he'll probably need help. But a rein of both ideas and modesty should be kept on him. Furthermore, I don't think he'd be the easiest guy to work with."