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Dan & Phil & Edgar & John

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By WILLIAM VAN ETEN CASEY

WORCESTER, Mass. — Two priests are sitting in their prison cells in Danbury, Conn., separated from all contact with the outside world and yet sending out shock waves across the country. This is an extraordinary achievement, even for Dan and Phil Berrigan, but they could never have brought it off alone. They needed accomplices. And these were eagerly supplied by the F.B.I., the Justice Department and the White House.

The most troubling aspect for the Berrigans in their decision to burn draft board records and plead guilty was the knowledge that they would finally end up in the silent gloom of some prison, totally cut off from their followers in the antiwar movement. When articulate activists and charismatic leaders like Phil and Dan go to jail, the movement that they have led slowly grinds to a halt and their followers tend to break up into disorganized little groups. That's what began to happen to the nonviolent Catholic Resistance when Dan and Phil disappeared behind Danbury's bars.

It was clearly in the best interest of the Administration to preserve that status quo. Keep Dan and Phil buried there in Danbury until the war, or the 1972 election, was over, whichever came first. That was the obvious thing to do.

But never underestimate the ability of this Administration to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. At some point it had to fall afoul of Alinsky's Third Law of Establishment-Dynamics which states that in any fight with the Establishment you can count on it for at least one glorious gaffe that will bring renewed life to your languishing cause.

The Federal grand jury at Harrisburg supplied that new life for the Berrigan cause. It indicted Phil Berrigan and five others for conspiring to blow up the heating system of five Government buildings in Washington

and to kidnap the Presidential adviser, Henry Kissinger. ("Kidnap Kissinger?" one of the defendants said incredulously. "That's almost as ridiculous as our other plot to have Phil Berrigan elope with Martha Mitchell.") Dan Berrigan and six others were named as co-conspirators but not indicted, a vicious legal maneuver in which the Government publicly accuses people but admits that it has no evidence for its accusation.

J. Edgar Hoover opened this latest chapter of the Administration's clumsy war on dissenters when he announced to a startled nation through his willing stooge, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, that the Berrigans were the leaders of the conspiracy to bomb and kidnap. His senile professional vanity had been badly wounded last spring when Dan Berrigan went underground for four months and made Keystone Kops of Hoover's agents as he led them a merry chase over the countryside. He also feels personally hurt by these Catholic radicals because in the past he knew he could always rely on Catholics to staff his agency and support his simplistic anti-Communism. His bitterness can be gauged by the fact that this was the first time the aging cowardly lion lost his cool and turned public accuser of individuals before indictments were returned.

Attorney General John Mitchell carried on the next phase of the war when he sought and obtained the indictment against Phil and then personally announced it. He lost out on Dan, however. The decision to seek the indictment was undoubtedly cleared all the way to the top by those shrewd politicians who gave us Haynsworth, Carswell, the Southern Strategy and the 1970 campaign.

The net effect so far of the Administration's moves against the Berrigans and their followers has been to produce an explosion of national and international interest in the Berrigans. I can personally verify one dramatic

index of that interest. An obscure little journal that devoted its latest issue entirely to the Berrigans and arrived on the scene at the time of the indictments is now a best seller. An additional press run of 30,000 copies had to be printed to meet the demand; Kösel publishing house of Munich will bring out a German edition this summer; Avon Books will publish an expanded edition for mass distribution in late spring.

Despite the incommunicado nature of their present confinement, the Berrigans are becoming increasingly known to more and more millions of people who would otherwise never have heard of them or who have known them only in a corner of their consciousness.

The peace movement that had lately fallen upon apathetic days is now revving up as the Berrigan plight dramatizes the issue of the war at the very moment of its expansion in Laos. The Berrigan followers have regrouped and are working hard at organizing defense committees across the nation. Phil and Dan are back. The movement is alive and flourishing. And Ramsey Clark, Hoover's "jellyfish" recently turned Portuguese man-of-war, sails into battle.

Oscar Wilde once said that the only bad public notice is an obituary notice. The Administration had the obituary notice for the Berrigans in its hand when it buried them in Danbury prison, but in a colossal political blunder it pulled them out of that morgue with its indictment and put them back on center stage where their personalities, their followers, their message and their cause are enjoying maximum exposure to the world.

Unbelievable. Thank you, Edgar and John and Dick. And you too, Martha.

Father William Van Etten Casey is the editor of that "obscure little journal"—"The Quarterly of Holy Cross College, Worcester, Mass."