

Quentin Fugitive Lawyer Surfaces

Talk With Suspect In Canada

By Henry Weinstein
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Stephen M. Bingham, the radical lawyer who disappeared three years ago amid charges that he had helped plot an attempted San Quentin prison escape by the black revolutionary author George Jackson, is alive, is continuing his political work underground and has no intention of turning himself in.

In an interview last month in a Canadian city, the 32-year-old Bingham appeared calm, healthy and in good spirits, even though he was resigned to the life of a hunted man for whom a new identity and constant security precautions had become second nature.

To avoid giving any hint of his whereabouts, he would not discuss where he lived — neither the geographic region nor whether it was an urban or rural area — and he would not say whether he had a job, whether he lived alone or whether he was in contact with other leftists underground, including the Weatherpeople.

Nor would he confirm or deny charges brought against him by a Marin county grand jury — that on Aug. 21, 1971, he smuggled a

gun to Jackson during a visit, thereby touching off an attempted escape in which six men, including Jackson, were killed.

But during several hours of conversation spread over two days, Bingham, a member of a prominent Connecticut political family, left no doubt that he favored a total restructuring of American society and that his thinking had evolved into clear cut Marxism-Leninism. He identifies, he said, with a variety of individuals and groups battling capitalist values, both in the United States and around the world.

"People may think," he said, "that I've gotten into mysticism like Rennie Davis (the anti-war activist who now is a devotee of guru Ma-

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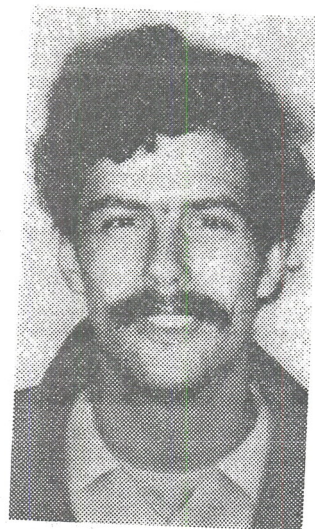
haraji) or am quietly living out my life. In fact, the opposite has happened. It's been a very good and strong period for me — growing — my involvement with the struggle is stronger."

Bingham said he chose to risk being interviewed in person because he felt the danger of his being apprehended had diminished over time and because it was important to have someone see him.

"Living underground has not weakened me — has not kept me holed up in a room," he said, "and that's real difficult to communicate in a tape."

The interview was suggested by Bingham in a phone call one morning last month. He and I had been classmates at the University of California's Boalt Hall School of Law in Berkeley. I did not know until he called whether he was alive or dead, and the conversation gave no indication where he was at the time.

If there was to be an interview, there were certain instructions that had to be closely adhered to: the meeting was to be in a Canadian city. I was to go there by way of another city. The site of our first meeting was to be outside



UPI Telephoto

STEPHEN M. BINGHAM
Radical Bay lawyer

the main entrance of the train station.

Bingham said there was more balance in his life now that he was "not frenetically thrown into things every day" as he had been before. "This has been a catchup period for me—trying to understand my background and what are the essential forces, both reactionary and revolutionary, we have to take account of," he said.

He is one of the heirs of Tiffany. His grandfather, Hiram, was a Republican

senator from Connecticut from 1925 to 1933. His uncle, Jonathan, is a Democratic congressman from the Bronx. His father, Alfred, was a state senator in Connecticut and started Common Sense, a left-oriented magazine, during the depression. His mother, Sylvia, was active on the magazine and, he said admiringly, is "an independent, active person."

Bingham graduated with honors in political science from Yale in 1964. During his junior year, he did voter registration work in the South and was arrested twice in Mississippi on misdemeanor charges. Later, he served in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone and assisted in Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign.

In the spring of 1971, Bingham became interested in the defense of the "Soledad Brothers", Jackson and two other black convicts who were accused of the revenge murder of a Soledad prison guard in 1970. After Jackson's death, the other two were acquitted by a jury.

Bingham repeatedly declined to discuss what he had done on the day of the killings. He feared that whatever he said might prejudice the fate of the so-called San Quentin Six, "who have been charged with murder in a smoke-screen to cover up the assassination of George Jackson — a revolutionary hero. I don't want my words twisted conveniently by those trying to justify murdering six more persons."

Speaking of Jackson, Bingham said: "I knew him well enough — he was too strong, too disciplined as a revolutionary to have done things in the way that was suggested — to throw his life away in a reckless suicide, if you believe what the prison officials say."

Bingham acknowledged that "people might wonder, if I were innocent, why I ran away." He recalled that Angela Davis, the black Marxist professor who fled from murder conspiracy charges in 1970, was later acquitted after being caught. But that was because, he said, "millions of people expressed their outrage, not because the jury system worked."

In addition, he said his life "wouldn't be worth very much" in prison awaiting a trial because the guards and prison officials "unanimously assume that I was responsible for the death of several guards" the day Jackson was killed.

Looking to the future, Bingham said "an important aspect of the things I want to do is to deal in the whole area of raising people's consciousness, including many people that we normally don't talk to—no limiting barriers."

Like a number of other American leftists today, Bingham stressed the importance of building a political party along Marxist-Leninist lines because, he feels, Marxism-Leninism "is the glue that binds together disparate elements of the movement." But he said the need for such a party should not become such a preoccupation that it diverted people from ongoing work.

But he said that "no matter how strong" he is and "how much I may have filled my life with work and activity, there's still an aspect" of living underground "that's like dying in a certain emotional sense. I love my family, and there's the reality that for the rest of my life I'll never see any of them again, or my old friends. But you learn to live with that."

Did he have any regrets about his decision to leave, to go underground? Without a trace of hesitation, smiling broadly, he said, "no."