

18 June 1972

HW:

Re your note of June 9 to /Larry with us marked in, asking why the administration might have needed the publicity attending the arrest and charges against Garrison on June 30, 1971:

The need appears to have been general and somewhat ~~acute~~ acute, but specifically so in that the Supreme Court ruled the same day (and later in the day, as I recall but cannot verify) that the New York Times and Washington Post were free to publish the Pentagon Papers study. In "The World in 1971" a yearbook AP has been publishing annually since the JFK assassination aftermath, its chronology for June 1971 carries the last two items in that order -- Garrison's arrest and then the Supreme Court ruling. It seems highly likely that this is the actual order, and that the administration anticipated the ruling and sought to cushion its impact with a sideshow. The warrants for JG's arrest were prepared the night of June 29, Mitchell said at the time.

However there were other and more general considerations that while not directly involved could have contributed to the decision to break the Garrison thing, which as you recall was part of a more general offensive against prominent Democratic figures which included former Gov. Koerner of Illinois and Mayor Joseph Alioto of San Francisco (although I have no files showing the precise dates for when they moved against those two, and there may have been others).

Perhaps the next most important thing which might have been involved was the scheduled return of Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese politburo figure, to the peace talks in Paris, on June 30th ~~on which~~ *and on* ~~same day~~ the National Liberation Front unveiled its seven-point peace proposal which included important concessions difficult for the administration to ignore. At the same time the North Vietnamese reportedly stopped talking of prisoners of war as war criminals and began referring to them as "civilians captured in the war." Clearly, the administration was not ready for brightened peace prospects this early in the campaign, and the Garrison splurge might have been useful in helping to contribute to a smoke screen.

But the administration was in serious trouble all over, one should remember, marked perhaps most prominently by the public reaction to the invasion of Laos in March and the publication of the Pentagon Papers story which began on May 13, the same day the government lost its case against 13 Black Panthers in New York on charges of conspiracy to bomb public places and murder policemen.

After the May Day demonstrations and mass arrests in Washington following the Laos invasion, the government also was getting much backlash against its repressive measures, and at the same time there was a growing chorus of criticism over the handling of the POW question, but most prominently from relatives and others who were saying openly by June 30 that the prisoners were being used by Nixon as political pawns.

In April, furthermore, the visit of the American table tennis team to Peking had reopened the whole China question to public discussion, with unsettling effects on both sides of the political spectrum in spite of the general agreement that it was a good thing that the ice between Washington and Peking had been broken.

These items from the ~~xxxx~~ chronology and other files appear to support generally the thesis that the administration needed as much smokescreen as it could get at the time:

- May 7 -- government announced unemployment ~~was~~ up to 6.1 per cent, with 10 per cent among blacks.
- May 13 -- publication of Pentagon Papers begins in NY Times. 13 Black Panthers acquitted in NY.
- May 19 -- Army demoted Maj. Gen. Samuel Koster for failing to conduct a proper investigation at My Lai, and stripped Brig. Gen. George Young Jr. of his DSM for the same reason.
- May -- 25 -- Murder charges dismissed against Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins.
- June 16 -- Leslie Bacon freed in Seattle.
- June 21 -- Govt. reported sharpest rise in living costs in five months, .5 per cent for May.
- June 24 -- Le Duc Tho due back in Paris.
- June 28 -- Supreme Court ruled state programs that reimburse Catholic schools for non-religious instruction are unconstitutional.
- June 29 -- Nixon vetoed the \$5.6 billion public works bill and announced he would not seek a tax cut or increase spending to stimulate the economy.
- June 29 -- Sen. Gravel tries to read his verison of the Pentagon papers to the Senate, is headed off by a prliamentary maneuver, and ~~xxx~~ begins reading them anyway to his ~~xxxx~~ subcommittee on public works.

Also in June there were polls showing Ted Kennedy was the front runner among Democratic prospects, and these were followed by a rash of references to Chappaquiddick.

But perhaps the Garrison thing also could have been part of the razzle-dazzle pulled off in connection with Henry Kissingers trip tp Peking and the announcement on July 15 that Nixon himself would go to Peking later on.

Actually, it already had begun. Kissinger himself left July 1 for Veetnaam, Thailand, Pakistan (from where he made his side trip to Peking) and returned via France. In the meantime Richard Helms had turned up in Isreal on June 28, and on June 27 Spiro Agnew left for a visit to 10 countries which would keep him out of the country for a month and out of any coup d'etat that might be generated locally by Nixon's China announcement on the 15th of July. Laird also left early in July (date never disclosed) and turned up in Japan on July 4, Tokyo time, while John Mitchell left July 8 to attend the ABA meeting in London. All except Agnew were back in this country by the 15th, with the possible exception of Mitchell, whose return apparently was not reported.

I now find a footnote on the POW question. The question was getting so much attention at the time that on June 22 CBS began a two-part series on it, finishing up on June 29. From^a review at the time it appears to have been presented in terms of whether POWs are political pawns, and if so, whose ?

In any case the prevailing impression gained at the time was of a ~~exasx~~ very complicated fast shuffle that was being pulled off. I find that on July 30, in writing to Ed Snow in Switzerland about the July 15th announcement, I wrote the following:

"Nixon's political opposition, including the Democrats, has sustained a confusing blow [from his reversal on China] but appears far from discouraged. After all, the country IS falling apart, although few mention this, or need to. Nixon cannot ~~bring~~ himself to do what must be done to halt inflation. Unemployment continues rising and probably is much worse than admitted. The balance of payments needs no comment. Very crippling strikes continued, one after another. Nixon MUST appear to be ending the war and wearing his dove costume without too much obvious discomfort if he is to survive. A few use the word desperation, but sotto voce. In any case, the drift into fascist methods goes on uninterrupted....with new methods of repression. Industries go blandly on producing jhmk that nobody wants but buys anyway because of Madison Avenue brain-washing, and it is possible that the end of bourgeois capitalism might come, not with a bang, but an overstocked warehouse."

At this date, it still seems that any or all of these factors may have contributed to the apparently premature breaking of the case against Garrison, but that the impending Supreme Court decision on the Pentagon Papers and the developments at the peace talks in Paris were probably uppermost in the minds of the orchestrators.

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P.S. -- Jenifer has come up with yet another tribulation encountered by the administration in May and June, 1971. On May 1, Father Philip Berrigan et al~~k~~ were indicted for a second time in a broadened indictment that expanded the conspiracy charge to include a series of draft board raids -- in other words, the prosecution no longer would have to prove the overt acts charged by JEH in order to obtain a conviction. On May 10 and 19 it came out that wiretapping had been used in the case. Mitchell conceded it in an affidavit May 18.

Later, on Aug. 16, Anthony Skoblick told Pacific in ~~Washington~~ LA that a third indictment had been issued quietly in which the specific charges that the defendants plotted~~d~~ to blow up ~~hyating~~ systems and kidnap Henry Kissinger had been dropped entirely, but the story was given only to a Harrisburg newspaper. You have a copy of the transcript of this tape from KPFA which we sent you.

In other words, things were tough all over.