

6 January 1974

Dear Harold:

Thanks for your letter of Jan. 2. It helps to clarify some things, but we both suffer from the necessity of not saying too much too clearly. I'm glad the Baltimore matter has priority; it will give you more time to explore things thoroughly and learn better what you actually can run into.

The more I think about it, the more I feel the question of timing can be all-important, but it can work both to your advantage and disadvantage. For instance, there is considerable possibility that the whole Nixon administration may be on the ropes a few weeks from now, ~~but~~ and normally that would seem to be a good time to spring your surprise, show your hand, or whatever. However, it also conceivably could only increase the desperation of the highly imaginative man whom you contemplate as a defendant. The fact that he again is among us is indicative of his potential and of his importance to at least two branches of the government. If he doesn't know enough to sink either or both then I misjudge the situation. In other words, he does not stand alone.

I shan't attempt to reply to your letter because I know so little. The only thing I can suggest is that to us here it seems that the question is not whether one should or even must deter evil, but whether the right time has come to make the attempt. And whether an attempt at the wrong time would not result in still more evil. We also see your point about overt action against you, which we think is normally entirely valid, but again, the prime question may be whether what is normally valid will have anything to do with what happens. Perhaps what I'm trying to say is that one thing to be avoided is ~~the~~ the frequently fatal mistake of pushing one or more adversaries into a corner from which there is no normal escape. Their choice of options under such circumstances cannot be counted upon to follow normality. And the options available to them are not those available to you or any other normal citizen.

Again, I do not want to discourage you, but would not want to neglect doing what I can to point out those things which seem here, however irrelevantly, to signal possible danger to you and what you represent.

On page 2, 6th graf, you speak of the potential defendant as though he were Nixon. I was not talking about Nixon. I was talking about a much more imaginative person, whose resources may increase as Nixon's fortunes decline. And I think they are going to decline. Like you, I feel his ability to stage a coup and declining if only because those ^{who} would have to carry it out are less willing to be used by such a tottering monarch. However, while I have to agree in principle that a coup against him is theoretically more possible, I see no signs of such, admitting of course that one normally ^{would} see any sign in advance of such a thing. I still think he'll plead bad health and resign rather than face the ordeal of impeachment and trial. The question is where the breaking point will come. The Democrats obviously are not going to force the issue, and the GOP would rather not but may figure it has to in order to survive. There are many imponderables.

Best from us both,

