

From a Cellblock in Connecticut

Denial of Parole to The Berrigans Was An Act of Revenge

The following statement was written by a group of prisoners calling themselves the "Danbury Resisters" inside the Federal Penitentiary in Connecticut, where the Berrigan brothers have been serving sentences for destroying draft records. After issuing the statement on Aug. 6—"the anniversary of Hiroshima"—they began a hunger strike. On Wednesday, Philip Berrigan and ten strikers were removed to a Federal prison hospital in Missouri. The statement gave these reasons for the prisoners' protest:

I. The denial of parole to Dan and Phil Berrigan.

The action of the board of parole was pure and simple: an act of revenge, a crime of punishment. Parole was denied Dan, although in June he had nearly died of massive allergic shock, and as a result, is seriously impaired in health. The board chose to ignore medical testimony offered to this effect by two doctors.

Phil's denial of parole is beyond doubt a spasm of revenge for his acts of resistance in Baltimore and Catonsville, and his refusal in April, 1970, to surrender to the law on schedule.

We demand the release of Dan, and a serious and open review of Phil's case.

II. We protest the operations of the Federal Parole Board.

At present the board conducts its

business arbitrarily, in secret, and with maximum delay. Its methods place the board's acts beyond public scrutiny. Such methods also impose harsh suffering on prisoners and their families.

In the Berrigan case, the board announced its decision within eight days; thus it sought to create the impression that all its decisions are reached promptly. In fact, before prisoners are informed of their fate, delays of six to eight weeks, or even longer, are the rule.

Moreover, prisoners have no access to their board file, nor is the board accountable for the reasons, often political in nature, which govern its refusal of parole.

We call therefore for a Congressional investigation of the Federal Parole Board, an end to its immunity and secrecy, a ruling that it be obliged to hand down its decisions within two weeks time.

III. We protest also the fate of Vietnamese political prisoners, especially those confined to the tiger cages of Con Son. We protest the Government silence, in face of the revelations

made by Congressman Wm. Anderson last year. We are appalled, moreover, to learn that the Saigon Government, with American approval, has contracted to build more of these infamous cages. We demand that such construction stop at once, and that Congressman Anderson travel to Vietnam, empowered to oversee the transfer of all prisoners from these cages.

This Danbury prison statement is addressed to all sectors of the anti-war movement. We are writing to you in the hope that our solidarity in resistance may meet your own, and that the repression and violence we risk may move you to support us.

The cause is yours, as well as ours. The fate of political prisoners as well as the fate of the Vietnamese people, depends at least in measure, on a peace movement that is on the move.

We are convinced that almost the exact opposite is the case at present. The American peace movement is all but paralyzed. Its condition is such that in an ironic way, even Nixon can count on it. He can count on it to be tardy and hesitant, to want the peace less than he wants the war. He can count on the movement to fear his jails, to dread his grand juries.

We ask: can we political prisoners count on you? Can the tortured, displaced, imprisoned Vietnamese count on you?

We wait your answer.

But the Government will take our demands seriously, only if you take them seriously. We prisoners can only raise the issues by putting ourselves on the line, in the hope that you will respond. "The issue of prisoners is part of the great issue of the war, which is the first issue of all. We support those in prison; we resist the war."

The war will end when Americans want peace badly enough. They have paid the price of war, in lives lost and taken, in the moral derangement of the nation, in the waste of the goods of the world. But they have scarcely begun to imagine the cost of peace, which is the moral equivalent of the cost of war, non-violent resistance, honesty and compassion in conduct, the human use of the world.

Americans pride themselves on never having lost a war. Their pride is their indictment. What they are declaring is: we have never won the peace. We have built military cemeteries and civilian slums, promised hope to the world and delivered death, sharpened our weaponry while our cities rotted.

We prisoners have chosen our way of resistance. We ask you to join us, in whatever way courage or outrage or the voice of God and man, may suggest to you.