

Letter sent to draft resisters who served time in prison

On January 31st, five of us who had met while serving prison sentences for draft resistance, occupied the office of the Presidential Clemency Board, demanding to speak to Goodell in the presence of the news media. We had come from five different states knowing only that we must do something to dramatize the fact that the war continues and that the clemency program is a farce. We had each recently received "clemency" letters, and our original intentions were to burn them in Goodell's office before the media - hoping somehow the message would reach the American people.

But then, a few days before the eligibility deadline, Ford announced a month extension. Our plans changed. We each knew resisters from prison whom we felt would like to be in on this. We decided to occupy the Clemency Board office and demand media coverage in order to get out a call to others to join us March 1st when we would return. Only this time we would go directly to Gerald Ford, since it is now his war, and because this punitive clemency program was his idea. Five people going into the White House to return clemency letters would be quickly and quietly dealt with by the security police, but fifty or five hundred would be a different matter entirely.

Our demands were met within a few hours at the Clemency Board office. Goodell came followed closely by tv cameras. The confrontation was taped by CBS but not shown nationally. Nevertheless, the word is spreading fast. Even before we could get off letters to other resisters, a number of people and organizations prominent in the resistance movement have committed their presence and their support for March 1st. The possibilities keep growing: perhaps there are veterans who would love to return medals as they have before; perhaps families would love to return gold stars and flags given in exchange for precious sons; perhaps others with imagination could dream up other appropriate symbols, such as income tax forms, to return to this new commander-in-chief who now begs for escalation.

This country has been dominated by the grip of militarism and the fear it instills in people of "the enemy" since World War II. But "we have met the enemy, and he is us(U.S.)." We are killing not only the Vietnamese but the entire planet with our bombs, our greed, our arrogance and our pollution. The spell needs to be broken, and it can only be broken with imagination and with non-violent resistance, with our music and with a restructuring of our values and our lives.

The "peace movement" has been very easy on the government these past two years since the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement. In those two years of "peace" 170,000 Vietnamese have been killed and 200,000 political prisoners remain in Thieu's prisons. In trying to spread the word on March 1st, we have run up against organizational politics and timid peacemakers who are offended by civil disobedience. No wonder the war rages on. The war will come to an end when our determination to end it is stronger than the government's determination to preserve Thieu's regime. It will end when those who are opposed to it are willing to pay the price.

It almost seems necessary to apologize for appealing to you now for further resistance. Surely it is someone else's turn to shoulder the burden, but apparently no one else is ready. It is only when put into the perspective of other third world countries that this appeal seems appropriate. The price for resistance in Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile, Uruguay, etc. is possibly death or imprisonment with torture. Our brothers and sisters struggling in those countries are forced to risk their lives, because people in this country are unwilling to risk anything.

The war has been changed - the government has learned that the people in this country are no longer willing to sacrifice their sons to preserve the Thieu regime. But unfortunately they are still willing to sacrifice their money. This government supplies the weapons, the planes, the bombs, the advisors, the training, the tiger cages, and the soldiers' pay. They no longer draft American boys, which further reduces dissent, but they still impel them to register - just in case. They no longer seek to "win" the war, but they can make it linger on year after year.

So from where is resistance more likely to come than from those of us who have been through their prisons and have found that not only can we endure them but that we can even grow inside them. This country has some very difficult years in store, and we don't expect it will be humanized by miracles or by politicians.

The scenario for March 1st is roughly as follows: We will gather at Lafayette Square (across from the White House) at 9:30 a.m. to run down final details, contingency plans, or whatever - also to speak and to sing. Around 11:00 those with clemency letters, medals, personal messages, etc. will walk through the White House on the daily tour and gather on the front lawn to wait for Ford. Others will lend their support by lining the sidewalk in front of the White House. We will not leave until he personally comes out to accept our "gifts" one by one. We will not give them to an aid, not even to Rockefeller. We think it would be good for the American people to see on tv a dozen, two dozen, fifty or five hundred people personally returning their clemency offers, their medals, etc. to the new commander-in-chief and telling him to shove both those gifts and HIS WAR. They will either see Ford accept them, or they will see us being carried from the White House by the police.

If this action makes sense to you, join us. If you cannot be here March 1st, send us your clemency letters, and we will return them for you.

Peace through resistance,

Jon Bach  
Stan Clark  
Gary Clausheide  
Kevin Jones  
Glenn Pontier

Hartford, Conn.  
New York, N.Y.  
Alderson, W.Va.  
Gilsua, N.H.  
Somerville, N.J.

P.S. Besides, it's gonna be fun.