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PERSONAL
INFORMAL

November 7, 1963

SUBJECT: Mr. Nguyen Van Bui

TO : General Le Van Kim

Dear Kim,

As you know, Mr. Bui is currently under detention in General Khanh's house, although technically free to return home; his ships are impounded and his bank accounts blocked.

I feel a considerable degree of personal responsibility for this state of affairs, since I was given a message by his sister-in-law, Mlle Cecillon (a close personal friend of Barbara's) during the morning of 2 November, to pass on to General Minh, that Mr. Bui supported the Revolutionary Committee and awaited the Committee's instructions as to what to do with his troops. I failed to pass on Bui's message to you at our first meeting because I anticipated seeing General Minh immediately afterwards. When I did not see him it was too late to prevent what happened.

Beyond the question of what is justice in this matter (a question of practical as well as theoretical importance), there are several practical problems which, I believe, require immediate solution. These are:

a. Freeing his ships so that they can be used to transport supplies (USOM and MAAG) which are now piling up on the docks and which are immediately needed in Central Vietnam. (It is unlikely that these ships would flee to another country because they can only be sold abroad with the approval of the Vietnamese Embassy in the country of sale. In any case, a guard detachment could be put on the ships.)

b. Maintaining the loyalty of the Combat-Workers Force by allowing Mr. Bui to use one of his bank accounts to pay them immediately. A reliable observer who has visited Vung Tau recently estimates that these troops are disturbed by Mr. Bui's arrest and Diem's death but will remain loyal to the new government provided Mr. Bui is freed and allowed to pay them.

My own assessment, after talking to Bui personally, and based on a personal acquaintanceship with him of over a year is that if he gives

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you his word that he will ensure the loyalty of his troops to the new Government, that he will remain in Vietnam until whatever charges exist against him receive proper investigation, he will keep his word. He tells me he is entirely willing to open his books and records for such an investigation.

Despite the initial treatment he received (being handcuffed like a criminal), I believe the Revolutionary Committee, if it wants to, can win and hold his loyalty. It seems to me that his contribution to Vietnam in effectively fighting the Vietcong to date (incidentally costing him over 20 million piastres of his own money), in itself, merits giving him just, not arbitrary, treatment.

Sincerely,