

Breaking Old Ground... and New

On September 29, 1974, William Meis, a draft resister living in Canada returned to the United States for the first time in seven years. The grace period for coming forward under Ford's earned re-entry program was at the half-way mark, and Meis was therefore able to avoid immediate arrest at the border. I'm not sure how or when Bill Meis got in touch with Safe Return. No doubt he was well-primed to follow developments bearing on his self-interest, and had gotten wind of our opposition to Ford's program, which we had taken the usual pains to publicize, most recently through Ed Sowders' press conference in Annapolis. One clue lifted from a subsequent issue of *Amnesty Report* reveals that "discussions were held in Canada," but whether Tod had flown up to Montreal, where Bill lived with his wife and children, while I was still in Europe, or after my return, I cannot establish.¹

I have little memory of being actively engaged in this campaign since my plate was overflowing with an exciting project that focused my attention elsewhere. But based on press accounts found in the record, I was certainly present in the planning and roll-out of what was to be the first act of public defiance to the Ford scheme by a returning resister. We had designed an action to take place in Washington on Monday the 30th, and had gotten the word out to our media contacts through the usual round of hand delivered press releases to major news outlets throughout Manhattan, followed up by telephone to key contacts to reinforce our message and prod for coverage. It's not clear, but I don't think we organized a press conference in New York. There's one clip from a wire service story that appeared in a Chicago paper. It reports on an interview with Meis and I by someone from the Associated Press based in New York, apparently by phone.²

My sense is we were all huddling at the office on the weekend, working out last minute details that would take Tod and Bill Meis to D.C. for the Monday action, and that I just happened to take the call from the AP reporter. But since Meis is also quoted, it is likely that New York was the first leg of an itinerary that was to take him, after Washington, to Springfield, Illinois, where, according to the piece in the *Chicago Sun Times*, “he would surrender to a U.S. attorney.” Facing arrest, and possible imprisonment, Meis remained sanguine. “If you commit yourself to action,” he told the reporter matter of factly, “you have to be willing to take risks.”

Meis’ stand was not only courageous, it was well-calculated. It’s possible that this brief encounter in New York was the only time I ever saw Bill Meis. He left an impression though of a savvy guy, a bit slick perhaps, who demanded more control over this Safe Return action than any of the military resister whose surrenders and defense we had undertaken. Meis also came with his own pacifist script which scratched a bit on my ears I’m sure, no doubt Tod’s as well. Such philosophical differences always kept us emotionally distant from the pacifist-oriented draft evaders, but fine points of ideology seldom blocked our deeper feelings of political solidarity when we joined forces in the public arena.

What strikes me now is that Meis was making informed choices based on his own reading of events. And, although he had taken a genuinely principled stand on the war which had led him into exile, it was not his most urgent agenda now to magnify this original gesture. He appears to have consciously timed his re-entry to benefit from the increasing public attention being drawn to the fact that earned re-entry was attracting few takers. Here Meis’ instincts coincided completely with his sponsors at Safe Return.

A space had indeed been opened for a clever resister to put himself in public view just as more and more media commentators, and at least one key politician, Senator Phil Hart of

Michigan, were re-examining what a real amnesty might look like. This is not to suggest that Tod or I imagined for a second that the political grounds for a just amnesty had been, or would ever be, established. We simply calculated that the atmosphere was propitious for a public challenge, but only outside the military realm, which is to say, not involving a deserter. Given how Ford's program was sputtering, even if we were to achieve only a modicum of sympathetic media coverage on Bill's behalf, we hoped to demonstrate that prosecution before a federal judge at this late date could only appear as a legal anachronism.

After all, with the inauguration of VOLAR, the all volunteer army, draft evasion was a crime that could no longer be committed. The country was now at peace and distancing itself with every passing day from the divisiveness of the recent turmoil. A show trial of a Vietnam War draft resister, an outcome we would threaten, might come off as tantamount to a witch hunt. Minimally, Safe Return would ride the Meis case to heap more discredit on Ford's misfire, and, if our stars proved as well aligned as our analysis, achieve for at least one individual a *de facto* amnesty in the form of non-prosecution.

The plan for Meis' surrender called for several stages to optimize the publicity spread. First, Tod telephoned - or alleged he had - to schedule an appointment for Bill with the President's Clemency Board, housed in the Executive Office Building next to the White House. The idea was that, once inside and face to face with an appropriate official, Meis would read his statement rejecting Ford's unacceptable terms while the TV cameras whirred and the print reporters scrawled in their pads.

None of this actually occurred. In addressing our own sympathizers later through *Amnesty Report*, Tod would explain that when he and Bill arrived at the EOB entrance they were "rebuffed by guards," and not even permitted to enter the building. This occurred, Tod claimed,

“with the full knowledge of the Board members inside, behind closed doors.”³ The next morning’s *The New York Times* provided a different slant, quoting a Clemency Board staff attorney who officially denied that Meis had ever “been granted an appointment.”⁴ The dispute around the appointment, whether a ruse on our part or not, was a total red herring, immaterial to the kind of ‘thumb in your eye’ political theater we had come to excel at for dramatizing our issues.

In seeking this confrontation in Washington, we were additionally motivated by an ideological grudge concerning the makeup of the Clemency Board. As principals, President Ford appointed three well-known figures, all of whom had expressed strongly their ambivalence toward the war in Vietnam. As chair, Ford tapped former Senator Charles Goodell, an erstwhile crony of the president’s initially in the House of Representatives who had been named to serve out Bobby Kennedy’s term after his assassination. The other two were Vernon Jordan of the Urban League and Thomas Hasburg, something of a public intellectual and president of Notre Dame, whose particular brand of liberal temporizing, was utterly disdained by the radical element. In essence all three appointees were men of the establishment who had agreed to serve on the board for whatever personal advantage it afforded them, indifferent to the fact that Ford was using them as liberal window dressing.

So we certainly intended to put the Clemency Board in the media cross hairs in the hope of provoking from their ranks such double talk as might further discredit their mission in the public eye. At the same time, our sneer toward institutional venality was only a sidebar to our gambit in D.C. The Clemency Board was our natural dance partner for this action whatever its composition, thus our physical presence on their doorstep was ordained by the flow of events. As to the matter of the disputed appointment with the Board, and despite the absence of

evidence, it was, I strongly suspect, a grandstanding ploy. We went to Washington for a clip from the *New York Times*, our objective so transparently obvious that the reporter herself actually implies as much in the kind of testy aside not often found in the copy of the nation's 'paper of record.' She described our action:

“As part of the carefully organized protest by the Safe Return Amnesty Committee which included a strong effort to interest the press with mimeographed statements and telephone calls, Mr. Meis attempted to meet with members of the President's clemency board...”⁵

That is precisely the scenario we were painting. The bit about “mimeographed statements” was a demeaning slander - our press releases always had a professional cast. No doubt we did annoy the reporter with persistent phone calls. And yet, not incidentally, we did seem to have a knack for getting covered by the *New York Times*, with Safe Return always mentioned in the same breath as amnesty. This was a mark of legitimacy taken note of among our *good* liberal donors who invested hard cash in such media triumphs.

Following our agitprop turn at the Clemency Board, Bill and Tod flew immediately to Chicago “for a tearful reunion” with his parents who'd come in from Decatur, Illinois, the Meis family's hometown.⁶ They were joined by Bill's wife, Elaine, and the couple's two small children. Bill and his young family then continued on with Tod to the Illinois state capital of Springfield, accompanied on the flight by the same *New York Times* reporter, Diane Henry, who had covered the Washington “protest.”

It is now obvious to me looking back that Tod and I were both suckers for these *femmes fatales* reporters like Judy Miller, and I vaguely recall that Diane Henry was of a similar octane: Brenda Starr: Star Reporter. On the one hand neither Tor nor I were made uncomfortable by

intelligent and powerful women. We naturally viewed some of these women as out of our league for bedding, but to give chase was always an energy boost. So we could play to such a woman's vanity, even as we blindly overestimated the sympathy these top rank female reporters felt for our cause, suffering not a few unanticipated hits as a consequence. I'm certain Tod was weary of the lengthy access Henry enjoyed with our client on the shared flight to Springfield. Happily, on this occasion, that caution proved unfounded.

Henry had asked Meis why he was willing to face jail now and not seven years ago when he refused the draft. He responded reasonably enough that the Ford program "denies everything we did and stand for." This was followed by an atmospheric aside that was certain to increase Meis' appeal, and possibly turn an ambivalent reader's gears one notch toward support for a real amnesty. Henry could not resist describing how Meis was feeding "his nine-month old baby, Marika, an apple while explaining his decision" to return.

The reporter next asked Elaine, identified as "Mrs. Meis, a computer systems instructor at a junior college in Montreal," for her version of her husband's decision to end his long exile by making a risky political gesture. "I should have seen it coming," Elaine responded. Her husband had been writing a novel over the past year "about a resister who finally decided he had to turn himself in. He became the character in the book."⁷ Bill had worked it all out in his mind before hand, Elaine said. It's not quite the interpretation I have provided above, but Elaine's enigmatic account seems to support my own belated intuition that her husband was not just rolling the dice for the sake of his conscience, and more power to him.

After landing in Springfield Bill was brought before "the U.S. Attorney who formally offered him Ford's clemency program. When Bill refused he was taken before a judge for arraignment on the original criminal indictment. The judge set bail for '\$2,000 and ordered

additional hearings within 60 days.” Bill was to remain in the U.S. and he left for his parents’ home in Decatur. Elaine took the kids back to Montreal where her job awaited. In his report, Tod adroitly framed the political significance of “Bill’s action [as having] highlighted the collapse of the so-called ‘amnesty plan.’”⁸

When Tod came back to New York he was anything but cavalier about the potential dangers Bill faced in the event of a decision somewhere up the line to play hard ball, and aggressively come after our client. Tod would again line up former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, as genuine an upper-crust turncoat as was General Smedley Butler a generation earlier, to argue at the preliminary hearings slated for early December. Neither Bill nor Tod felt any urgency to stay in close contact during this waiting period. And it was about a month after his surrender when Bill wrote briefly that “things have gone well since I returned to the Midwest. There have been some hostile calls and letters, but people are more interested in Amnesty than I thought. Let me again thank Safe Return for all you have done for me.”

As Meis’ case was left to tread the legal waters awaiting its call to the bench, Safe Return again shifted to other matters. Not only were we intensely productive all that fall and into 1975, but the range of our undertakings had never been more eclectic. We had never emphasized merchandizing as a source of income. But our trade in amnesty bracelets was so brisk we reordered a full gross etched with the names Herndon, Michaud, Sowders, Simon - to which we added Dick Bucklin, and now, Bill Meis. Otherwise, fund raising was as always relentless. There are many ‘thank you’ letters to generous contributors in the files for these months, including one I sent to Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward acknowledging their “generous support,” and inviting them “to join Alexander Calder, Dalton Trumbo and Peter Weiss on our Artist Support Committee.”

I don't believe we ever heard back from them. Newman and Woodward's donation came by way of a list we had rented or swapped for, probably RESIST. Theirs was a onetime gift. In fact I can't recall a single instance of a repeat donation from a celebrity that had come in over the transom - Gunsmoke's Dennis Weaver and Star Trek's Leonard Nimoy come immediately to mind. We simply were ineffective in cultivating these Hollywood donors for sustained giving, another reason why direct mail - and our small roster of guardian angels - was so critical to our survival. And once more, following the publicity splash around Meis' surrender we had occasion to thank Kit Tremaine for a substantial gift, as well as Mal Bernstein for funneling yet another shipment of Moscow gold, which, as on previous occasions, as I never tire of repeating, was conveyed anonymously on a check payable by the Bank of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao.

Major responsibility for Safe Return's business side fell to Tod. He had gone back and forth all that fall with the IRS which continued to stonewall our application for tax exempt status. We finally hired a tax lawyer to argue - and eventually win - our case early the following year. But Tod's day-to-day business energies were devoted increasingly to the close management of our direct mail campaigns.

This was a multi-handled task grounded in routine. There was the production pipeline to manage, the orders and invoices for envelopes, letter and card stock. Our files are crammed with a paper trail of memos Tod sent and received almost daily from, among others, our list broker. She was responsible for bunching a selection of big market zip codes from a wide selection of commercially available lists to make up our next 'drop' of 100,000 pieces. Then there were the mechanicals with the copy and half-tone photo images to get to the printer, who then returned the proofs for correction. On coming off the presses, the whole package went to a 'mail house' where it was assembled, bundled by zip code, and finally delivered to the post office for franking

at the non-profit bulk rate to which our newly won tax exempt status now entitled us... and then finally mailed. Bulk mail at the non-profit rate was then 2.4 cents per unit, and getting it brought costs down while allowing us to increase the volume of our mailings.

Tod always adopted a congenial tone bordering on seductive intimacy when talking with our corps of suppliers, unless something untoward developed to threaten our tight production schedule, a critical issue for a cigar box enterprise like ours operating on a thin cash-flow margin. There are many images of my friend and partner I could and will continue to conjure in this work, and one of the most ubiquitous would be of Tod honing his voice to a steely edge and delivering staccato a withering tongue lashing, totally blind siding the offender on the other end of the phone line who had derailed our agenda. Add to this the endless disputes over billing and payment, also well documented in the files, and the one constant that characterized these mundane business ties was their perishability. The torrent of notes and memoranda in the files dispatched by Tod to direct and monitor the progress of a given mailing, are accompanied by an on-going flow of queries to sound out the terms and availability of alternative suppliers in almost every category.⁹

Eddie Sowders was now called upon increasingly to help administer the mechanics of our direct mail campaigns, and the record shows that he was quickly acquiring a level of competence that allowed our funding efforts to advance smoothly even when both Tod and I were out of town. I would also keep the paper work and necessary phone calls in play when necessary, and played a role in whatever mailing was under preparation. Having Eddie to take up that slack freed my time for other projects that better suited my talents. Tod actually got a rush from the business side, but I could never generate a similar zest for it the way he did, and as apparently Eddie did as well. After all, direct mail fund raising was a marketable skill, but that idea was

more likely to be implanted in Eddie's mind than Tod's or mine. Now that we had successfully established our working lives in a stable organizational structure it no longer occurred to me to think practically about a career beyond this self-generated world of radical political activism. Eddie, on the other hand, had not benefitted from the boost both Tod and I had gotten from our secure middle class backgrounds, and he must have felt acutely the disadvantage, especially in education, as he now strained to play catch-up by combining his belated college obligations with a full work load.

Typically my contribution to the mailing campaigns was to draft the cover letter that would go out under the signature of a well-known public figure or celebrity. The letter would detail our latest accomplishments, and plead an urgent case for continued support to generate more of the same. Tod and I collaborated closely on designing the general look of the mailing, and competed good naturedly in writing attention-grabbing copy for the outside of the envelope or the return card the donor was to fill out and slip into the postage paid 'business reply envelope,' called a BRE, with his or her donation.

We had now begun to display a line of copy on the face of the BRE to suggest that donors might spare us this expense of postage by putting their own stamps on the small return envelope. This immediately got us in trouble with an overzealous postal inspector who suddenly impounded our BRE's, informing us that this practice of soliciting a stamp was prohibited. Tod quickly assembled a sheaf of BRE's from other non-profits, like the Farm Workers Union, who also employed this widespread practice, delivered them to the appropriate official and the backlog of BRE's appeared in the morning mail.¹⁰ If, incidentally, a given contribution exceeded twenty-five dollars we would send the donor a 'premium.' In this period that was a

copy of Jim Reston's *The Amnesty of John David Herndon*, which was now out in paperback, and which we were ordering by the case at the author's discount.

In the final analysis Tod's and my symbiotic style of reaching all decisions together, including minor ones, can make it difficult to assign original authorship for any given program, campaign, action, or document that we created or produced except where the record itself can make that determination. He and I shared compatible facilities for wordsmithery, phrase turning and sloganeering. On public occasions, I was more introspective and scripted, whereas Tod might act more off-the-cuff, relying on a natural orator's verbal skills and ability to think on his feet and fill in what he had might not have worked out in advance. He would have made an excellent trial attorney, but for his utter disinterest in the practice of the law.

Tod thrived on the public stage, whereas I was always more comfortable leading from the wings. This difference kept us from developing the competitive tension that had limited Tod's partnership with Jeremy Rifkin. But Jeremy was more inclined to act unilaterally because he lived and breathed for work and little else. Whereas, Tod, if for no other reason than his globetrotting lifestyle, had more incentive to share the reins of control on an equal footing with someone whose reliability he could depend on when he was away, and all the more so with someone like me who could innovate on a level he respected.

But our personalities were also very similar in at least one negative sense. We reinforced each other's behavioral aggressions, while acting invariably in a conciliatory, even affectionate, manner toward each other. We somehow managed to resolve any discordant views or opinions - in fact quite rare over the course of our partnership - without the slightest hint of the confrontational style that might have marked our dealings with others. If I was sometimes perceived as less volatile than Tod, it was only because I was happy to cede the public space to

him. But I was hardly immune from bouts of nasty outbursts like those I attribute to Tod. I just tended to reserve them for some personal affront where I felt compelled to defend myself, often by overreacting.

Those retroactive reflections notwithstanding, even the cold facts enshrined in the correspondence files for late 1974 and early 1975 that frame the outline for this chapter do not fail to stir a memory of the excitement I believe my mates and I experienced collectively in the period being covered here. The anti-NATO conference was a focal point for a revival of interest among experienced organizers for updated work with a new generation of active duty GIs. Most of our correspondence around veterans and GIs issues over the previous year had been to engage the long commentaries we had been receiving from Linda Alband, usually in asides unrelated to her contributions as a close collaborator with FORA, first in Portland, Oregon and now in the Bay Area. Linda had kept us apprised of the internal struggles of VVAW with which she was also long associated as a supporter, and later, a member when non-veterans were permitted to join, most of whom were women.

In mid-September Linda had written to Ed Sowders about an “RU plot” to take over VVAW. Eddie replied, “I thought it was common knowledge that there was a strong RU [Revolutionary Union] influence (and possible control) within VVAW,” Ed replied expressing his neutrality in this dispute by striking a non-sectarian note. “Personally, I still haven’t formed an opinion about RU. Some of the community work done by their cadres in Detroit was impressive.”¹¹

Linda was now being drawn into the military study circle around Steve Rees who had deep roots in the GI resistance through the publication of *Up Against the Bulkhead* [later just *Bulkhead*], an antiwar tabloid dating from May 1970 and initially aimed at Naval personnel

stationed around the Bay Area. Eventually the paper's contents were broadened to address members of the armed services generally wherever they served, including Vietnam.¹² Another alumnus of the old guard, and himself a former GI dissident, Dave Cortright, was now in Washington at the Institute for Policy Studies, a leftist think tank where he was researching a dissertation that, when published in the coming year, would become the major work to document the extent and impact of the wartime GI Movement.¹³ Cortright thus maintained regular contact with activists staffing the few remaining GI projects, mostly in the South and on the West Coast near major naval and military installations, but also in Europe where the ubiquitous Max Watts seems to have been everyone's principal interlocutor for information on the continental scene.

Cortright and Rees were both involved in an effort to reincarnate USSF, the United States Servicemen's Fund, a prime funding and organizing entity behind the GI coffee house movement during the war. I doubt if this was our interest since we would have been weary of creating another coalition force like NCUUA that would potentially pinch our self-claimed prerogative to independent action. Already we were getting pressure from Cortright to pay the airfare to Amsterdam for a couple of GI organizers who wished to attend the anti-NATO conference, which Tod begged off since, given our own docket of activities, I'm sure we already had every available penny budgeted. Moreover, the projects in question were unable in this emerging era of a volunteer military to attract the level of GI involvement along with sufficient outside financial support to sustain themselves, and so their viability as players in this transformative period was questionable.

That Tod in particular was unambiguously committed to having Safe Return engage in solidarity work with and on behalf of active duty service members could not be doubted. But we were predestined to operate in a manner already patterned after our on-going practice of

sponsoring representative cases, and then backing them by national campaigns to highlight the larger issues they reflected. As impresarios we would stage our own productions; as publicists we would then seek to promote them, although these were not the terms we would have ever used to describe our roles. It was a shared commitment to a radical political agenda that sustained our efforts. Moreover, the seriousness with which we took this renewed GI initiative can be documented by the forward looking report, "Resistance in the armed forces continues," that I suspect Tod wrote - or wrote most of - for the fifth edition of *Amnesty Report*. It is early evidence of the emphatic advocacy on behalf of GIs that Tod Ensign would pursue till the day he died. To give true scope to this claim, I am reprinting a considerable excerpt from the original editorial here:

With the Vietnam cease fire agreement approaching its second anniversary, antiwar sentiment and civilian *agitators* can no longer be cited as the primary causes of the continuing disaffection of American GIs with the various military services.

Since the last US troops were withdrawn from Indochina, the Pentagon has orchestrated a massive and costly PR campaign in an attempt to restore public faith in the role of the military. The Defense Department has made much of its Volunteer Army - touting it as more *professional*, yet at the same time, more responsive to the needs of the individual soldier. Billboards and magazine ads proliferate which show grinning male GIs - some sporting well-trimmed sideburns and moustaches - as they entertain their European girlfriends in Parisian-style sidewalk cafes.

All this hype is aimed at convincing young men and the general public that the soldier, sailor, marine and airman of the Seventies is well accommodated by the *new* military; which continues to portray itself in the manner of the Fifties as the guardian of democracy throughout the world.

The Indochina War and Watergate have caused the American people to critically examine the traditional role of the US military, along with the foreign policy it implements. The public must continually penetrate the veil of propaganda with which the Pentagon shrouds and protects the armed forces like a feudal domain, so that the very structure of the military institution may be scrutinized and changed.

Unfortunately for the Pentagon, ad campaigns cannot mask the atrocious conditions within the Armed Forces today. The cosmetic application of Madison Avenue techniques has done little to alter the true atmosphere in the military which can at best be characterized as racist, sexist, drug-ridden and in every sense autocratic and anti-democratic.

Every month thousands of young men and women are forced to join the armed forces as their only alternative in a deteriorating economy incapable of providing them with jobs, much less meaningful work. These *volunteers* are increasingly Black, female, and generally, from the poorest sectors of the American working class.

Countless others are lured into picking the military service over civilian employment through deceptive or outright dishonest recruitment practices. The potential enlistee is promised the world - in training, foreign assignment of

choice, even a tour with your best friend should he or she enlist with you. They're hurried past the fine print, however, where the military reserves the right (which it often exercises) to renege on one of more *guarantees*, if they alone deem it *for the good of the service*. There is no redress for the deceived recruit... no choice of quitting; the contract binds the enlistee but not the shyster service.

Once inside the service, the GIs of today (like their predecessors during the Vietnam period) still find they have forfeited their most basic constitutional and human rights. They find racial antagonism tolerated if not encouraged by the commanders who portray racism as a *problem* of an under-educated white minority, rather than being seen as a cancer deeply rooted in the structure of the military. The Third World GIs experience discrimination in housing, military justice, job assignment and promotions. The combat soldier finds less attention being paid to train him in the conventional craft of warfare and growing emphasis placed on riot control exercises to be turned against civilians in his own country.

The resistance of today's servicepeople is varied and complex. For example, Black sailors have been energetically fighting the pervasive racist practices in the Navy, so well publicized lately. Their resistance has been met with incredibly repressive measures. Not atypical is the case of the ten Black sailors from the carrier *Little Rock* who called a legal meeting after duty hours to discuss their grievances. The Naval authorities' response was to order an unprovoked attack by a Marine contingent who beat and arrested many of the sailors. These men now face years in the brig for their alleged acts of "insubordination."

To an outside observer unfamiliar with the repressive atmosphere within the military, some resistance - such as the widespread defiance of hair length regulations - may even appear trivial. But the military recruits are not exempt from the relaxation of cultural inhibitions in the society at-large. Yet at this moment literally dozens of courts-martial are being convened to prosecute and imprison GIs refusing to conform to the military's outmoded appearance standards.

The thought tails off, and I'm certain this rapid fire analysis, not without its strong empathic undertone, was written under deadline pressures in the midst of a dozen competing tasks. But its purpose, it now appears to me, was to serve as a kind of marker to announce a trending drift in our political focus, genuine but by no means dominant. Our reconnecting with this GI-oriented political work would proceed in much the same way that we had become involved with amnesty. We would study the question in some depth, reading from a wide variety of source materials that analyzed or reported on the nature of the new military. We would seek partners with whom to exchange think-pieces that invited debate, and gradually began to formulate arguments and ideas for actions around our evolving positions.

So Tod very much had this new undertaking on his mind when heading for California in late October to stage a series of joint press conferences with the usual West Coast FORA regulars. The hook was to keep public attention fixed on the Ford debacle, while simultaneously pumping up and sustaining interest in the Meis case. Our thinking would have been, we are not out of the woods with Meis, still very much anticipating, as I have said, a costly trial, requiring airfares, additional lawyers' fees, publicity, administrative support and 11th hour fund appeals. A prominent graphic in the fifth issue of *Amnesty Report* - probably not distributed until late

November - displays a drawing of a bracelet inscribed 'Amnesty for Bill Meis.' A banner heading set beside the image reads, "Funds are urgently needed for Bill's defense..." If Tod's head was been leaning toward the future, the main action in California was still all about amnesty.

In San Diego Tod did plan to call on the Center for Servicemen's Rights, a long standing player in the GI Movement now re-oriented as a Maoist or Marxist Leninist collective. There was a shake-out going on in the Movement, a twilight of revolutionary zeal that raised the ideological horizons for many activists when it was no longer possible to organize their opposition to the System around the major symptom of American imperialism, the war in Vietnam. In this atmosphere scores of committed antiwar activists, after a long immersion in the revolutionary cannon, became hooked on the orthodoxies of the Leninist Left. Many combined themselves with some fiercely competitive vanguard group, all contemptuous of the communism preached by the Soviet *revisionists*, and intoxicated by the alternative vision offered by Stalin's greatest disciple, Mao Tse Tung. With the distraction of a popular national opposition to an unpopular war no longer diluting the underlying revolutionary quest, the base of industrial workers, including those enlisted by the military, could be addressed, or so it was argued, around issues of class oppression, or even directly around an anti-imperialist political program.

The Center, or CSR, in San Diego, operating in a cadre culture of this ilk, continued to circulate the GIPA [GI Project Alliance] News & Discussion Bulletin, an impressive sheaf of photocopied typewritten pages crammed with internecine polemic aimed at their ideological rivals as well as on the-spot-reports of struggles by grassroots projects operating among soldiers and sailors, and with whom they networked and communicated. For some reason, likely because Tod was away, I had written the group in late September to announce his San Diego stopover.

Despite having discovered this letter with my signature on it, the truth is I don't remember the group at all. To the degree we knew anything about CSR or its GIPA bulletin's existence it likely came from Steve Rees and his crowd, because I find no evidence before my letter that we had any prior history of direct contact with them. I can only assume that Tod wanted to check them out in person to get a sense if we could work with them should our involvement in this arena actually increase as we had intended.

The description that follows of the GIPA bulletin is based on a fortuitous occurrence at the time of this writing.¹⁴ *The* question of singular importance here is that my failure of memory reveals another aspect of this lapse that I am obliged to clarify. At Safe Return we had the general picture of what was taking place among those of our fellow activists who had extended their post-Vietnam commitment to work with the military's enlisted ranks. But it is now evident to me that we weren't always up on the details.

It appears, for example, that we didn't have a clear picture of what the GIPA folks were up to. Moreover I don't think we quite grasped that VVAW was making a strategic turn toward the active military with its GI Organizing Conference, to which Ed Sowders, and therefore Safe Return, had been excluded. In what was for us a preliminary fact-finding stage, we had arrived independently at the renewed possibilities for on-going work with GIs. Much like the other interested parties, our involvement was propelled by the undissipated momentum that continued to carry us beyond our recent struggles against the Vietnam War. To the degree we gave VVAW any thought at all, except as the subject of political gossip, we probably anticipated crossing swords with one or more of these relentless antagonists at the upcoming anti-NATO conference in Amsterdam.

I have not determined that Tod kept that initial appointment in San Diego. Nor, if he did, whether the encounter gave rise to any clear expression of differences. From a trail of correspondence over the next several months, I can trace our repeated efforts to get CSR to send us their informative bulletin. We had sent in the subscription fee, but the group refused to respond. Why, we expressed with genuine bewilderment to our Bay Area comrades, was this happening? It was happening, we later learned, because CSR refused to work with “Trotskyists,” the label with which they had us pegged.

I suppose a case could be made that we were fellow-travelers, but we counted our points of affinity with the program of the Fourth International very selectively. Moreover we were just as leery of the typically robotic American Trot of the SWP variety as most New Leftists, with or without party affiliations. Someone – likely Steve Rees - must have convinced CSR that we weren't *that* sort of Trotskyists, after which, I gather from a reference in the record, we started receiving the GIPA bulletin. From the single copy of one edition of the bulletin James Lewes has provided me, I can digress with a thin scraping from its general tone and contents.¹⁵

The bulletin I examine here projects my narrative ahead by six months into the spring of 1975. Nothing of fundamental change had occurred in the radical political milieu during this interim to disqualify this document as still very much emblematic of the period in question. . . . What little I have learned about CSR, I have gotten from this edition of their bulletin, and its fifty pages of copy divided between political discussion and project reports.

There are several reports by civilian staff members of projects located near overseas American bases in Asia. One of these merits particular mention. It tells of a team of five dedicated activists on Okinawa where units from all branches of the US armed forces have a foothold, including a very large contingent of Marines. The report's author complains that the

project has attracted only a small number of active duty service to its meetings and film showings. The marines the organizers encounter casually in the streets are gung ho, full of zeal for their super-sized self-image and cult of combat. Whatever had lingered of Vietnam-inspired antiwar sentiment from the draft era seems finally to have been stripped from the Corps. Only as rumors began to spread among the cannon fodder that their Marine units on Okinawa - a mere puddle jump to Indochina - were on stand-by for reinsertion in Vietnam to block the North Vietnamese advance to the Saigon, did business at the project suddenly pick up. This imagined mobilization was no doubt an eleventh hour pipe dream among a small clique of die-hard hawks in the Pentagon and the US Congress.¹⁶ The rumor was apparently enough to get the attention of some Marines on Okinawa who were less enthusiastic about facing combat, and who were suddenly approaching the GI project to learn more about their options to avoid it.

There is much high toned rhetoric in these reports of doing good works among “the masses,” of political education to discredit imperialism, combat sexism, and the like. It was not uncommon by then for Movement males, especially in the more sectarian and communal political circles, to retroactively define themselves in matriarchal terms as radical or socialist-feminists. One discussion circle at a GI project in Japan proper took up the issue of sexism and attracted five male participants to a discussion. In the absence of women in the group to struggle with directly, they evolved instead into a men’s consciousness raising group. Subsequently, and in the spirit of the self-criticism sessions that were the Maoist ritual for purging oneself of former political sins, the men confessed each in turn his past manipulations for “getting over on women.” Uniformly throughout the writing in this bulletin one hears the persistent voice among these earnest young Leninists of selfless duty and urgency to bring to the toilers in uniform the good news of revolution. Politics of this nature, already embarrassingly utopian and

otherworldly in its own day, when examined forty years later highlights a remarkable period in American culture that supported a great deal of self-delusion.

The bulletin's unreality factor is ramped even higher in the discussion section, which, saving the best till last, features a very long reply from CSR to criticisms of its practice by the *NO*, the National Office of VVAW/WSO in Chicago. The writing here is intelligent and coherent, at least internally, a gem of the polemical double-talk that had become the functional idiom of so many radicals drawn to these sectarian groups. In this instance there are territorial issues vexing these factional rivals. The *NO* was now very much in the clutches of the RU, the Revolutionary Union, and had by the spring of 1975 "expelled" several local or regional VVAW chapters, including San Diego, where the members refused to toe the RU line. Moreover the *NO* leadership had engineered a split in CSR itself when several of the groups' former co-thinkers broke away to create a new VVAW chapter in San Diego loyal to the RU leadership in Chicago. Was this provocation "based on the concept of healthy competition that we've heard a lot about lately [from you]," ironized the CSR author rhetorically?

VVAW had said, in effect, let us see whose line draws more support from the disgruntled sailors we both seek to engage here in the San Diego naval station. Going head to head with CSR, VVAW claimed, would demonstrate the superiority of its line, and draw uniformed service members to 'the workers' movement' directly around a program emphasizing anti-imperialism. CSR wasn't buying it. They wanted VVAW to stick exclusively to work among veterans, and leave the GI organizing to groups like theirs who'd been doing it for years. And anyway, CSR insisted, they still had the better line: "class struggle, not simply anti-imperialism, is the road to socialism."

Back at Safe Return we would have seen this parsing of incantatory abstractions as a

risible side show, but more consequentially, as a potential impediment to more meaningful action. Such an attitude may explain why we had paid so little attention to the work of CSR in the first place. We were hardly immune from our own brand of leftist truisms, and strongly emphasized in Movement circles the class content of our own work and politics. But, in the end it was the same old story. These GI projects were service organizations, they rallied *in situ* to the immediate needs of individuals who ran afoul of the military system; we were doing something else. As for VVAW, having wrapped itself in the garb of Chinese revolutionary fundamentalism, it failed to find a place as an alternative to the nation's mainstream veterans groups that would appeal to a potentially broad base of progressive former service members - as peace loving veterans - not as agents of anti-imperialism.

From our vantage point, the anti-NATO conference was still the flagship event for the re-launch of the GI movement, and by mid-November, Tod was writing Lew Simon that Ed Sowders would soon leave for Amsterdam to represent Safe Return among "a number of GI groups and military related projects like our own." The decision to have Ed take my place in Holland had been made a month earlier, after which Ed immediately wrote the Dutch activists that he planned "to arrive in advance of the conference to aid in the preliminary work." This tells me two things. First, Tod and I both felt confident of Eddie's abilities to play this role in our stead, and that the projects I was working on were more interesting to me than a conference, even in a European city like Amsterdam that I found greatly to my taste.

In his letter Tod added that "Michael is in California working up a new project, the production of Public Service Announcements. We plan to air these 30 second spots on TV stations across the country. We anticipate a major celebrity appearing in the spot with a family member." Most of the fall I had been involved in the planning of an art benefit for the coming

January that we would build around the gouache donated by Alexander Calder. It was this project to which I was devoting the lion's share of my attention, but now put aside for a week to follow-up on a contact Tod had made on his own recent stop in Los Angeles with a progressive ad man named Marvin Segelman who had offered to produce the PSA for amnesty on our behalf.

Again roles were being switched, but here strictly for reasons of scheduling. Tod, just back from California himself, was soon on the road again "to Louisville," he informed Lewis, "to spend a couple of days at the NCUUA conference. We still have difficulty with some of these folks, but are trying to patch up relations wherever we can." I suspect that expectation was tactically motivated, and that Tod's real agenda for engaging the NCUUA activists was to silence a rumor by those in the coalition, like the AMEX crowd, who remained most antagonistic to Safe Return, and envious of our powers, which they greatly exaggerated.

As Tod explained to Lewis, "the rumor was going around that we dropped the Dick Bucklin case, hence the stiff sentence he received." It was probably true that Dick would have preferred our sponsorship, but "we had already committed ourselves to going ahead with your case," Tod reminded Lewis. Dick then chose to entrust his public return to AMEX and company, who blundered by staging his surrender in remote Colorado. Moreover, Dick had just dropped by our offices for a visit, Tod told Lewis, and if there were hard feelings they went unexpressed.

There was also a flap around this time regarding our behavior toward another client, Tommy Michaud. In September Tod had written to Tom and his wife Debby to congratulate them on the birth of their child, and to ask if Tom wanted us to represent him before the Clemency Board should he desire to go that route. I can't be sure if Tod was attempting to reprise the Michaud case as a vehicle for our on-going opposition to the Ford plan; I don't recall

discussing it. Then in November, Tod was writing Michaud again asking him for written statement to deny “that Safe Return ripped off the vets we’ve surrendered, which is being alleged by some former ‘friend’ [George Carrano, I suspect]. The rumor is affecting our ability to win support and money from a couple of sources. We don’t have any sense you feel that way and would appreciate your saying so.”

In due course, Tommy wrote back that he had nothing but admiration for the way SR had handled his case, and was very grateful to us. But that this may not have been his true attitude I was only to discover years later in a letter from Paul Cox. Paul was just out of the Corps when we surrendered Tommy at Camp Lejeune. He describes meeting Tod and I for the first time, and his first impressions of “two sophisticated, hyper, slightly weird politicians who were focused on making Tom’s trial into an indictment of the war.” Paul then added that “Tom was later critical of Safe Return for lack of support, but I thought he was just whining.”

By “lack of support,” I suppose Tom meant that we didn’t provide him with some form of subsistence based on what he imagined to be all the money we were raising around his case. If so, he was far from alone as the more recent rumor about Bucklin inspired by the NCUUA crowd illustrates, in believing that our many successes somehow meant we were floating in dough, when, in fact, we were always robbing Peter, sometime literally, to pay Paul.¹⁷

Some time around the third week of November I boarded a flight for LA, where I would stay with women friends that Jeremy Rifkin, Tod and I had first met in 1970, undergraduates at Connecticut College for Women in New London, spending their junior year in New York at NYU. They had a modest apartment in LA’s old Jewish neighborhood, and both had migrated to California in search of career opportunities, and, I now suspect, Jewish husbands with comfortable West Coast lifestyles. One of them, Karen I’ll call her, had a brother well-placed in

the music business at Electra-Asylum with whom I hoped to explore new avenues for funding. I remember hanging out with these women, and meeting the brother who took Karen and me to what he described as Frank Sinatra's favorite restaurant. The contact went nowhere, another Hollywood meeting as an end in itself, but with a tasty pasta thrown in.

As to the real purpose that brought me to LA, I can barely visualize the hour at most I spent with the ad guru on a dark set where Burt Lancaster, from behind a desk and wielding a pair of glasses as his only prop, was filmed reading for the spot I had probably helped script on my flight to the coast. The wording was vague and temperate, but not unprincipled:

Thousands of young men had to leave their homes and families rather than serve in the Vietnam War.

They want to come home, but President Ford's Clemency Board would brand them as second class citizens.

War resisters need amnesty not clemency. Let's really put the war behind us and bring these men home now.

You can help. Contact SAFE RETURN, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y.

During the shoot, I stood quietly off to one side, a super cargo with no role to play. I represented the paying client, although at a fraction of what a commercial PSA would have cost. It was not cheap by our standards, however, and we did have to shell out at least four thousand dollars in several payments to cover lab and printing fees for the film, the crew having all generously donated their services. We were able to make these payments because the PSA campaign proved extremely popular with our better heeled donors. As for Lancaster, a well-known Hollywood radical and vocal opponent of the Vietnam War, that he took no fee I need

hardly mention. He was all business though, and wrapped things up efficiently after a couple of takes.

I asked to meet *Mr.* Lancaster and have a photo taken with him. I was and have long remained an unabashed fan. He graciously accommodated, then shook my hand while I no doubt showered him with words of gratitude, and he was quickly driven off in a two tone cream and brown Mercedes sedan. I've would meet many celebrities over the next few years, but I never asked any of them to pose with me for a photo. That 8 x 10 glossy with Burt Lancaster has hung in its simple frame in whatever room I have called my study ever since. The actor and I are about the same height. We are both looking askance of the photographer's lens. Lancaster is dressed quite soberly in a suit and tie. And I look like what I was: a radical of my era, long haired, mustachioed, wearing what was my costume de jour, a Levi denim jacket over an incongruous tailored shirt and light sweater, a string of love beads hanging mid-chest with a 'look at me' smile plastered all over my face.

The PSA campaign would occupy a place on our administrative agenda for many months to come, as we promoted and distributed our videos and tapes to TV and radio stations country-wide. FORA members and other supporters were enlisted to call station managers to urge them to run our spots, which, even watered down as they were – the reference to 'desertion,' for example, conspicuously absent - still generated considerable controversy, a subject to which I will return in its place. We had run into more slander from NCUUA members - insinuations from the higher echelons, like Louise Ransom and Henry Schwarzschild who we competed with head to head in big dollar funding circles - as we attempted to get loans from Carol and Ping Ferry, and then Bernie Mazel, to cover the large outlay of postage for our big November mailing.

In the midst of this, I was eagerly gathering the donated works of many artists, some of world renown, in preparation for our art benefit scheduled for mid-January.

Before leaving for LA, I had written to Cleve Gray, an artist that Alexander Calder had suggested as someone to help us solicit works, prints for the most part, from other artists. Gray was married to Francine Du Plessix, a prominent writer very much connected through her birth and background to France, where she and Cleve most probably traveled in the same circles as the Calder's. Certainly without Gray's good offices we would never have collected the number and quality of the works we assembled. In my letter to Gray, I outlined "a viable plan for selling the prints."

The letter covers two pages and is very detailed, apparently in part to demonstrate that we had the know-how to find buyers for the donated works. There's a section in which I discuss the pros and cons of "pre-show publicity," as opposed to drawing a crowd by invitation only. We were inclined toward the latter approach to avoid the possibility of having our show overrun by tire kickers with no intention to purchase the works. I suggested we would mail notice of the event to our own donors in the Metropolitan area, and also consider renting a commercial list of known print collectors. We might sell raffle tickets for the original Calder. 140 tickets at \$25 a chance would cover the minimum asking price for the Calder of \$3,500 which had been set by the Perls Gallery which represented the artist. Or we might charge an entrance donation for which the guest would receive "a Calder 'Safe Return' commemorative poster, wine, cheese, etc."

As for that poster, while I was in LA, Tod had made a deal for \$800 with a print maker to screen 500 sheets from Calder's original, adding SAFE RETURN in bold block letters centered on the reproduction's bottom margin, followed by 'Artists' Auction for Amnesty, Soho, New

York, January 18, 1975.’ How the word “auction” got in there, I cannot recall. But Calder had not only approved our request to create the poster, but had officially allowed us christen his original work with the name of our organization. Later this same generous benefactor would agree to individually sign seventy-five of the posters, which I had shipped to him back in France, and he then subsequently signed and returned without delay.

In closing my letter to Cleve Gray, I brought up the possibility of having a celebrity on hand to draw the raffle ticket, or play a role as a presenter. I mentioned that we would ask Richard Dreyfuss, who I further identified as “Duddy Kravitz” from the title of the film then appearing, a breakthrough role for the actor. I may have first come into contact with Dreyfuss while in LA for the Lancaster shoot, but I have a persistent recollection that he had called our office in New York cold to express an interest in working with us. It had certainly surprised us to learn that Richard was a CO who had performed alternative service at a hospital in LA, even as his first star turn in the Fifties nostalgia flick, *American Graffiti*, was being filmed. What the letter to Cleve Gray confirms is that our collaboration with Dreyfuss had certainly begun around this time; it would continue moreover well into the following year.

There are several letters in the files for the late fall of 1974 which are invaluable to me now for taking the pulse of how Tod and I understood more sharply our conflict with the other players in the amnesty movement. There’s no doubt that we resented having to defend our record, much less our behavior, to both B.L. Mazel and Carol and Ping Ferry, both of whom had raised questions about their future support based on reports they were hearing from our rivals, who masked their own ineffectiveness by attacking us. The letter to Mazel followed a meeting with him where he raised the criticisms he was hearing. It must have struck Mazel as a kind of Macy’s versus Gimbals feud over bragging rights, and not a matter of politics, because before we

left his office, the man we much respected as our direct mail guru, agreed to a loan of \$2,000 toward the postage costs of our next mass mailing. As was customary, we had agreed to repay the loan from the mailing's first receipts, since Bernie was quick to ensure himself against a potential downside. But, again, this was business- or at least restricted charity - not politics.

I doubt much time had passed after Bernie's decision before our letter went out to thank him, but more pointedly, to avail the opportunity of declaring why, "over the years, we have had to make decisions on program that have often differed with the ideas advanced by other organizations working in the same area." Our success, we argued, spoke for itself. But more important, we grandly asserted, was "our right to pursue an independent course - so long as that does not interfere with the activity of others or do damage to the issue we're all working on." These "others," moreover, "evidently feel their time is best spent by blocking our efforts, rather than devoting their full energies toward achieving our mutual goals."

A letter in early December to Vinnie McGee, a factotum for the Ferry's, specifically addressed his phone call weeks before voicing criticisms his employers were hearing in Westchester from rival wagging tongues that "we don't properly support and defend the resisters we've represented..." I had written Carol Ferry before we approached Bernie Mazel asking her to advance us \$5,000, perhaps to cover the entire cost of the upcoming mailing. "We could pay for the mailing from our account," I had explained, "but that would restrict our ability to move programmatically." What that vague and bureaucratic term suggests is that we wanted to reserve our cash supply against expenses for the Meis case, and, now, to help underwrite the relatively pricey PSA campaign, although, for some reason, I chose not to provide such details. I did, however, include the exact cost-per-thousand for each component that went into making up the mailing in question:

\$61	Postage
\$16	Letter House
\$13.12	Printing
\$12.15	Envelopes
\$15	Lists
\$0	Layout - labor donated

This letter elicited from the Ferry's a demand to see the entire package, to include the cover letter, before they could commit to anything. To this we demurred, saying that "we don't usually have copies of the finished package ourselves until the bad addresses come in." We would see only the blueprint for final approval before printing, I explained. This was true as far as it goes. But, while I cannot support my suspicion with evidence, since I haven't been able to put my hands on this particular letter and can't even say who signed it, I suspect I was stalling them. There may indeed have been something these by-the-book liberals might have found *outré* in our showmanship or confrontational language. The loan was not forthcoming.

With nothing at stake, we finally got around to responding to the criticisms McGee had enumerated by phone some weeks earlier. On the matter of "the cases we've handled, the men were thoroughly briefed as to the "public" nature of our defense and strategies," we wrote. Moreover, only Tom Michaud and Lew Simon had received prison sentences, and of durations "that could be considered average penalties, considering the length of AWOL and surrounding circumstances." And only Lew's case gave rise "to debate about the quality and intensity of our support," (apparently not feeling it was necessary to share the recent rumor about Michaud's disgruntled afterthoughts). To illuminate the tender issues around Lew's case we now forwarded to McGee "copies of the relevant correspondence during the period of Lew's confinement."

Then we cut to the chase. "We're aware that some of your information may have come from George Carrano..." But Carrano, we wrote, when working "closely with our committee from April 1973 to March 1974... never once raised any of his criticisms or differences with us

openly or directly.” He had, moreover, “participated in and ratified every major decision” bearing on Lew’s case during this period.” The one error we would admit to, was “not insisting that a motion for a writ of *habeas corpus* be filed on the issue of Lew’s confinement prior to trial.” But this reflected thinking after the fact, and Lew’s pre-trial confinement had been a source of frustration to all of us, not just George Carrano, for which we found no solution at the time. Beyond that we told McGee, “We can’t think of anything further we could have done in support of Lew.”

We allowed that the second criticism McGee had mentioned, that “we were loners who don’t work with other groups is more difficult to answer succinctly.” And we decided to spell thing out once and for all:

That basic differences exist in the political outlook and philosophies of the various amnesty groups cannot be ignored. To a significant extent, our difficulties with other groups can be traced to these differences. For one thing, we are oriented toward reaching ordinary working Americans. We try not to alienate people by “leftist” slogans and rhetoric attached to laundry lists of social injustices. We are also uncomfortable with the ‘hippy’ style of volunteer poverty favored by some in the amnesty movement. Further we are not social pacifists and don’t believe that abstract moral appeals against war or violence are the means of building a popular movement for basic social change in this country. Finally we are deeply conscious of being Americans and believe that a profound understanding of the American experience is *essential* to any strategy for social change. It is no exaggeration to say that a number of groups working for amnesty basically differ with us in some, or all, of the above.

There's more, but this stretch, above all, calls for comment from a latter day eye. To be "deeply conscious of being Americans" cannot be understood only in the same shared sense of Jeremy Rifkin's vision of a purer political current to be drawn from our nation's revolutionary roots, and around which, by this time, Jeremy was having a good run in the media as the Bicentennial year rapidly approached. The American identity that we spoke of differentiated us from many Leftist antiwar activists of the era, yet it remains an elusive idea in my mind, difficult to pin down. Even now I can offer only sketchy insights. I do know - or at least want to imagine - that this identity transcended politics, and bled more widely into a culture from which Tod and I were *deeply* alienated, yet, paradoxically, inextricably bound.

It has something to do with a sense of ownership and belonging no different than what we perceived in the average American, and why we claimed to target Middle America for our radical dissent much the way Thomas Paine had sought to convince the confused and wavering colonial masses that their grievances toward the British Crown were "*common sense*." We strove to package radical interpretations of certain key events that would appear alongside what was mostly more conventional wisdom in the media that the average citizen consulted to keep up with the news. How could one influence public opinion if one refused to engage the public in ways they found familiar? And, if you stopped trying to engage the public where they were, and not where you wanted them to be, then what the hell were you doing?

The kinds of arguments we made in public, the dramatizations we staged, reaching toward mainstream sympathy and experience, did not, of course, have the full measure of our anti-militarist views, much less our arguments with capitalism. These views might be somewhat more evident in, say, *Amnesty Report*, circulated among those who minimally shared our position

on total amnesty and the criminality of the Vietnam War. Moreover, as I have sketched elsewhere, Tod and I also had lives on the Marxist Left, an active and kaleidoscopic milieu that was both domestic and international in scope. And we would soon find a topical outlet for exercising some of our leftist intellectual chops over the coming two years we would observe closely and write about the events of revolutionary Portugal. But we did not expect to have that specialized political conversation with the general public. Even the war crimes issue as the hook for justifying desertion during Vietnam was by now a non-starter in an amnesty movement that increasingly embraced national reconciliation as its modest objective, and no longer required a reexamination of the war. Calling for a 'clean slate' represented the pragmatic choice on the swelling common ground inhabited by both the informed and the indifferent.

In contrast, the cadre combinations were on the rise as many activists attempted to prolong the spirit of militant struggle by closing ranks with like minded comrades under the discipline of a *proletarian* party. They would no longer just talk about the working class they would fade into its parade. Cadres sent to operate in certain factories or civil service occupations, notably the Post Office, did not last long in those worlds sprouting anti-imperialist slogans, or advocating adventurist actions. They were there to blend in and provide leadership at moments when organic demands raised by the rank and file might be better focused and spurred along. In some cases, this commitment turned into real world organizing, evolving into lives and careers devoid of former revolutionary fantasies if not a good deal of private nostalgia. Most just abandoned their cults and fell by the wayside, finding social reintegration where they could. But while these cadre groups have shrunk dramatically over the decades since the Vietnam period, they are still around, and a careful eye can detect the sectarian touch in what remains of the peace movement even today.

It wasn't just a matter of true belief. Tod and I had that. Our lives and politics were simply less schizophrenic, more anarchic and bohemian. The last thing he or I craved was to strap on the harness of a traditional job or career, or to imagine that a demonstration of class solidarity meant you had to march in the same boots as the oppressed workers. And, while we aligned our politics against those forces in the American Imperium who brought war and misery to foreign lands, we were infinitely more committed to the social struggle in our own country than in someone else's and were not much given to the hero worship of Third World icons.

Our letter to the Ferrys went on to acknowledge without elaboration "our own mistakes and pettiness... [as] causes for some of our problems with other organizations." But we stressed our confirmed opinions that our work around amnesty stood the test of independent judgment, and for every critic of our self-directed approach, there were many others "that we have worked with, and continue to work with, antiwar and amnesty groups, across the country." We then briefly inventoried our track record, including for "the last six months" the volume of materials we had produced and distributed. Our letter closed with the hope that this account would give McGee and the Ferrys "a more balanced picture of Safe Return, warts and all."

And while the Ferrys had not coughed up an advance to help cover our mailing costs, they soon came in for a donation of \$2,000 on the strength of the new PSA campaign which could not help but impress them. Another \$1,500 earmarked for the PSAs arrived by way of Mal Burnstein and his shadowy clients who dwelled in the Kremlin, if not in fact – for who could really say – at least in our cocky imaginations. [TK footnote on having tried to track Mal down]. There were a number of other big checks as well. As for the reappearance of George Carrano in the Safe Return *apologia*, this was merely additional evidence of our belief that George, after our break, and singularly among our critics attempted to hurt us in a manner that was more direct

than the constant background grumbling we were subjected to by the others. And perhaps Tod and I both now looked on George now as a pitiful case, given what Lew Simon had written early in the fall about George being in Stockholm for a month, and now returned to his former job of plotting schedules for bus lines on the MTA, which for the two of us would have been akin to a descent into hell; we would find security too, in time, but on our own terms.

I find nothing in the files recording Tod's impressions or experiences around the NCUUA conference in Louisville. Tod had written Lew Simon that Louisville was his "favorite city," and maybe he wasn't being ironic as I was inclined to read those words, but he passed before I could ask him. If there was jazz and especially good eating in Louisville, he may have been speaking literally. In any event, Tod was very likely traveling with Pam or one of his other girlfriends, and had made little more than a cameo appearance at the amnesty confab where he would have been bored to tears. In one document I find from that fall, a "communiqué" from AMEX addressed to the Movement Against U.S. Imperialism, I mark a political watershed that at least some of the AMEX regulars, certainly Knight, had now crossed into the Workers World Party, an offshoot long separated from the Trotskyist mainstream.¹⁸ Here again was a turn to orthodoxy Tod and I refused to make, and felt less and less inclined to continue the conversation with those who had.

As for NCUUA's institutional wing, the civil libertarians and the churches, which certainly did not operate under the banner of anti-imperialism, they were now almost exclusively engaged by what might be accomplished on Capitol Hill. In this setting, being on the witness list for this or that set of hearings was their prime objective. Thus when Edward Kennedy decided to hold amnesty hearings a week before Christmas in 1974, a vague and strangely unattributed

reference that *New York Times* reporter Diane Henry had placed in her October article covering the surrender of Bill Meis, was suddenly rife with meaning.

Henry had written that “Meis had the backing of several groups fighting for unconditional amnesty, particularly the Safe Return Amnesty Committee.”¹⁹ And now these “several groups,” still unnamed, had essentially wrested Bill’s case from our docket, which proved a fortuitous development for all concerned. NCUUA’s big players - the ACLU probably had a major hand in it - had gotten Bill Meis on the list of witnesses Kennedy and his Senate Judiciary sub-committee would hear. By this time Meis was likely in close contact with those in NCUUA among whom, as a CO and pacifist, he had more kindred ties. That we had not been consulted about his appearance before Kennedy, and were perhaps momentarily miffed, was mooted by the fact that, “just days before Meis was scheduled to testify in Washington, the Justice Department decided to drop all charges against him.” The U.S. Attorney’s office in Illinois had apparently “told the press... they’re not willing to publicly prosecute a case which they might not win.”²⁰ We were thus spared the burden of defending Bill Meis and able to concentrate on a menu of activities that was much more to our tastes.

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1. Footnote Tod's passing May 24, 2014, and the impact this will have on my on-going narrative.
 2. "Illinois draft evader to fight clemency plan," Richard E. Meyer. *Chicago Sun Times*, Sept. 30, 1974 (AP).
 5. *The New York Times*, October 1, 1974. Op cit.
 6. AR #5.
 8. AR #5.
 9. Rachel Ensign, Tod's daughter, spent many hours in the office with her dad, long after Tod and I had dissolved our partnership. After his death, during one evening of Shiva held at their home, Rachel commented that she thought Tod's heated manner was the way everyone talked on the phone.
 10. Our personal names and addresses were salted within the Safe Return list, so that whenever it was acquired and mailed by another organization, we would get several samples of their mailings, to include their BREs, which often used the same 'save-a-stamp' approach.
 11. For what is probably the most objective account of the role played by the Revolutionary Union (RU), later the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in VVAW, see Andrew Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, New York University Press, 1999.
 12. "Up Against the Bulkhead, A Photo Essay with Text," Steve Rees with Peter Booth Wiley. *Ten Years that Shook the City: San Francisco 1968-1978*. Edited by Chris Carlsson. City Lights Foundation Books, 2011.
 15. *GIPA News & Discussion Bulletin*. Issue 28. May 1975.
 17. Personal communication by email from Paul Cox, July 2, 2009.