

Organizing the Exile Community

It was mid-October of '72 when Ann and I arrived in Rome. Awaiting me at American Express was an aérogram dated the 12th sent by Tod Ensign from the Hotel Rossini in Copenhagen. He was in Denmark to attend a war crimes conference involving exiles, but only tangentially focused on the emerging amnesty issue which it was Safe Return's mission to promote. Our new ally George Carrano of Up From Exile was arriving from Sweden with six other resisters. Various rivals were also gathering, and Tod laid his lash in particular on the Quaker delegates, "their usual pain-in-the-ass apolitical righteous selves..." How, Tod asked rhetorically, did the Quakers square the "contradiction between their religion and what the Vietnamese revolutionaries are about?"

This was an old grudge. Since launching Safe Return, we'd butted heads at several meetings in Philadelphia with the national leadership of the Quaker's social-action arm, the American Friends Service Committee. At the same time we maintained excellent relations with regional AFSC branches, especially in Cambridge, where the staff were virtually indistinguishable from other antiwar activists. The AFSC brass, however, like their ACLU counterparts in New York, were suspicious of New Left radicals they viewed as unaffiliated reds, and with their emphasis on resisters of conscience, were soft on the deserter question. Tod signed off, "See you in Stockholm next week." His note was all the tune-up I needed to jump back into the fray.

Tod had been gone since early October, and neither of us would return to New York until late that month. Having been last to depart, I'm sure Tod put someone in place for back-up, not least, to retrieve, and where necessary, return important phone calls. To aid us in this task Tod had installed a state-of-the-art answering machine called a Record O' Phone. It was either just before or just after Tommy Michaud's court martial. When Tod told me the cost of this purchase, \$743.65, I was stunned at the extravagance. We were solvent, but hardly flush. It was an audacious move. And it was COD - collect on delivery - so we couldn't stiff the company or drag out repayment to suit our cash flow.

We enjoyed an equal partnership, but there was also a division of labor, areas in which one or the other had greater interest or was simply better at. And Tod was certainly better at the business side. So I never attempted to tie his hands, and he reciprocated. The unspoken assumption between us was that around any given position or decision we would agree, allowing for the possibility that we wouldn't. Only then would we argue our respective cases, and, not infrequently, one would change the others' mind, or, just as often, we would arrive together at the middle ground. In a long strategizing letter to AMEX the previous July Tod had written, "Mike's out of town. I haven't had a chance to discuss [the enclosed points] with him. Therefore, I think he'll concur, but he might not." Since the points in question were likely products of the close affinity in our viewpoints, I probably did concur.

The Record O' Phone was about the size of a bread box, and it proved an immediate boon to office communications. We had two battery powered beepers the size of a hard pack of cigarettes which could send a two-frequency signal over any phone line, and cause the answering machine to play back our messages. The Record 'O Phone replaced an answering service switchboard, a process often beset by delays owing to operator-overload. The new machine was

particularly useful when we traveled out of town for a day or so, especially keeping our date books straight, and to field a call of opportunity from any number of sources. We did not, of course, take the beepers to Europe; international phone calls in those days were only for the elite or for life and death emergencies. I'm guessing Tod left his beeper with Pam who may have volunteered to help out till we returned from Stockholm.

I'd already been to Stockholm twice, the first time on my Grand Tour of Europe in 1970, and a year later when I testified before a Soviet-dominated International War Crimes Enquiry, an account of which can be found in my earlier memoir, *Vietnam Awakening*. It was not my favorite city, and not a place I'd have gone back to except under the current circumstances. Stockholm felt hard to me, and I experienced most Swedes I met as cold and unapproachable, a prejudice I do not cling to with any particular vehemence. On this third visit our sole objective was to meet with the exiled American deserters, and to attempt to draw the active leadership elements more closely into the Safe Return orbit. We had nothing recreational on our agenda that I recall. Here Tod would be a better witness.

There was a meeting called by George Carrano and his comrade Lew Simon, and both Tod and I addressed a room full of deserters, answered some questions, vigorously debated others. The line we always pushed linked the amnesty issue intimately to the broad agenda of the antiwar movement, and this proved persuasive to the majority in attendance, thus strengthening Carrano's hand within Up From Exile. We demonstrated that amnesty could be part of the struggle, not a distraction from it. The simple fact was that most of the deserters in Sweden wanted to go home if they could minimize the personal consequences, avoiding jail time being high on their list. By investing hope in the amnesty cause, they were tightly embracing their own self-interests.

It appears that it was also at this meeting where Tod and I first raised the issue of getting resisters to contact their family members, seeking their public support for the amnesty demands of their exiled son or brother. We were in the early planning stages of creating such a network, and this suggestion also met with general approval. One or two voices at the meeting were raised in challenge to our views, so we did not have the field completely to ourselves.

Fortunately for us the doubters peppered their remarks with obscure and ill-understood Leninist fire and brimstone, as if to parody the very infantile leftism Lenin himself had eloquently railed against. We were offering something much more immediate and concrete than revolutionary evangelism.

It did turn out that one of these deserters of evangelical persuasion had wanted to do the very thing Tod and I were advocating, organize an international conference of exiles. Except, he wanted the organizing centered in Europe under his control, and not in New York under ours. He would manage to ally himself with a few other hard core revolutionary fantasists, as well as a more moderate middle class hive of American draft evaders in the UK, one of whom, Roger Williams, published, *The New Exiles*, an account of his resistance and Canadian exile that was widely reviewed in the U.S. On that basis, Williams was much sought after by the Amnesty liberals. But, while Williams expressed hope in McGovern in equal parts to his hatred for Nixon, he was far from being an Uncle Tom; just the opposite. Cribbing the title for a recent article in AMEX from Edgar Allen Poe, he presented his resistance as irreconcilable, and his return to America as a "Descent into the Maelstrom... a journey to hell." As one of the chief voices among those skeptical of amnesty's political value, Williams supported the rival European faction in forming ACE - American Committee (or Community?) of Exiles, from his new base in London. When that competing effort at organizing a conference fell flat, largely

through the maneuvers of George Carrano, several of its participants, including Williams, would be offered spots on our event's agenda.¹

Just days after returning to New York, a letter went out to our hosts in Sweden expressing thanks for their hospitality, and reporting our intention to invite AMEX's Dee Knight to New York following the presidential election in a week's time, to help draft a conference proposal for internal distribution. The day before Dee arrived Tod and I composed another, longer letter to Lew and George, waiting until the seventh of eight paragraphs to voice our concern about not having heard from them in the ten days since we had left Stockholm. We likely doubted UP's firm grip on fellow exiles in the face of pressures from their rivals, and thought of them as the weakest member of our emerging triumvirate. Clearly we were also trying to set a professional pace for our joint enterprise, though we would not have expressed our intense commitment in those terms. The letter, reproduced here in full, illustrates how Tod and I conceptualized this organizing moment, and provides a profile of the mind-set we shared that generated the ideas and activities of Safe Return. And it does so in words taken from the time in which they were written.

November 8, 1972

Dear George and Lew:

Well the McGovern mania and accompanying frenzy have been, as anticipated, "consigned to the dustbin of history." Now, hopefully, numerous radicals that were hitched to the star of the Democratic Party will get back to serious, independent organizing.

The implications for our movement are, we feel, generally positive. McGovern as leader of the "loyal opposition" will be a far more principled ally of

the Amnesty movement than was McGovern the candidate. Also, funding channels will begin to unfreeze again, tax write-offs always providing more incentive to give than good intentions.

In addition we must not make the mistake, based on expedient yet unconnected political rhetoric, that Nixon/Agnew are not going to act on the Amnesty question. The very force of historical circumstances will propel them to some sort of action.

So, our work begins in earnest. We must read between the lines in order to understand and prepare for the revelation of the Administration's position. Our position, program and strategy must be developed and acted on immediately. It is particularly important that the Left flank assert itself now in a visible manner around the program for amnesty that the resisters themselves view as irreducible.

The Half-a-Loafers are stirring off their asses again. Already two conferences of national scope are planned. Though lacking in any class character (i.e. trade union participation) they nevertheless will attempt to dominate the response of students, church-going liberals and assorted arm-chair revolutionaries. Their influence within these vital institutions, schools and churches, (sorry: they = ACLU, NCC, CALC, NSA, et. al.),² can be significant to total. They presently lack, however, one vital ingredient that could severely undermine their legitimacy. That is the active participation of exile, veteran and other activist groupings. No one doubts that they can find those within the resister community to serve their needs and do their bidding.

These individuals cannot provide the H-a-L'ers with more than a flimsy and extremely tenuous cover - easily penetrated and exposed. The liberals will be forced to deal with a unified front of principled activists on the amnesty question, especially if their ranks contain the very resisters whose existence *per se* has given rise to the need for this movement. The idea of consolidating our strength through the vehicle of our mutually proposed conference must be acted on with the highest priority. The more time we delay, the greater the likelihood that, once again, valuable psychological and political turf will be gratuitously surrendered to those who presume to shape and interpret our reality through the prism of opportunism.

Dee arrives tomorrow. Neither he nor we will have the benefit of your thoughts. We have heard nothing from you since we parted in Stockholm. Your importance to the success of the proposed activity is central. Therefore we can do nothing but the most abstract planning until we are confident that we have your full participation and support. For instance we are prevented from drawing up a proposal for funding; we cannot, generally, discuss our plans with the conveners of other conferences in order to put their minds at ease that we're not in competition, but merely see great value in an autonomous, unified exile community. In other words, we can satisfy the liberals with the narrowest explanation of our purposes. This unified exile community will prevent the spreading of distortions like, "exiles don't really want to come home, they don't want amnesty." Just the opposite would be the case. "The position of the resister

and exile communities is clearly stated. Representative organizations are active in building an amnesty movement around principled demands, etc.”

It would really be great if George could get on the road and pull together the Pan-European character of the exile community we all talked about. Please let us know if any obstacles have arisen to alter the strategies discussed in Stockholm. We will write again - probably jointly with Dee on the outcome of our talks - within the week. WRITE!

Power/Love Mike Tod³

The letter, while it rambles and wanders, and is in places floridly or awkwardly phrased, also expresses that terse, direct language of conspirators fully engaged in a political contest. Viewed from the narrative present, this document affirms how seriously we had set about the task of uniting the resister community in Europe, Canada and the United States around the Safe Return program for amnesty. While Tod and I worked tirelessly to project our influence and leadership, we had no vision or ambition to control an entire movement. What we did have was much better than that, much more honorable. Safe Return's reputation was based on the merits of having widened public awareness of the amnesty debate through the media impact of our dramatic surrenders of two deserters. I can't say if an independent investigator would conclude that Tod and I at that moment had done more to define Amnesty's politics than any of the other players. I believe that interpretation can be supported by the record. But I can also see more clearly that the swashbuckling contempt for the liberal agenda in our initiatives was an abomination to those who wished to rein us in, and the ideological ground over which we battled stands in stark relief: they preached reconciliation to the status quo, where radicals like us shouted for accountability and change.

Our concern over the reliability of the Stockholm partners never fully abated, though, in the end Up From Exile - mostly through George Carrano's efforts - operated in full partnership. It was Lew Simon, however, who would confirm the positive impression made by Safe Return at the meeting in Stockholm. While not directly to us, Lew did get off a couple of letters, one to Dee Knight, another to his old comrade Gerry Condon, both of whom shared with us the news of Lew's strong endorsement. Condon quoted Lew's description of our trip to Sweden as "an immensely valuable experience for us here. I think we have struck solid ground to build upon and most important we now have a clear conception of our goals and strong support from AMEX and SR."

Gerry Condon had by that time decamped from Stockholm to Canada, with the intention to continue organizing exiles. It was from his new base in Vancouver that he now wrote, in fact he was responding to a letter from Tod. Gerry's letter closed with a tease that he was still considering 'safe returning.' It was flattering to see how rapidly that phrase was gaining currency in pro-amnesty exile circles. And, of course, we had attempted recruiting Condon at the time we chose John Herndon for our first test case as I have already described in Chapter 2. The falling out between Gerry Condon and Safe Return referred to there had yet to occur, since the publication in January 1973 of Jim Reston's *Amnesty of John David Herndon* containing the slur on Gerry that would cause the rift, was still two months away.

For the time being, as Lew Simon had pinpointed, it was that *clear conception* of how to present and advance the amnesty cause from the Left that allowed Tod and I to choose our working allies from among the most politically advanced leadership of the resister community in exile. In a reasonably democratic manner this assembled leadership would now seek to move the demand for Universal Unconditional Amnesty - our manta - ahead on two important fronts, the

international conference of exiles, and the creation of a family support network. Toward the most immediate of these goals, planning for the conference, we would devote the next three and a half month in intense transnational collaboration. Gerry Condon also briefly joined this inner circle of planner/correspondents.

With the U.S. presidential contest put to rest and Dee Knight visiting in New York, a joint letter went out to our collaborators: Jack at AMEX back in Toronto - George and Lew in Stockholm, Gerry in Vancouver and Others. The marker for unnamed parties anticipated the next level of distribution and involvement, whether Joe Heflin in Paris and Max Watts of RITA-Act in Heidelberg, or movement contacts in the U.S., like CAMP News, VVAW and the Southern Conference Educational Fund. SCEF - which Knight was developing a close relationship to – was an old civil rights organization with close ties to the CP that was showing concern about repression of blacks in the military, and especially the plight of black deserters. We never intended to merely engage in conversation among ourselves, but were aiming for the broadest possible participation of radical pro-amnesty forces at our conference. For the venue, we proposed Paris, and the dates, Washington's Birthday weekend toward the end of February 1973.

On the two tightly packed pages of our report we outlined "what the conference agenda should look like." There were plenary sessions and workshops, media events and private social time with "Vietnamese and other Indochina patriots as an expression of solidarity." Our hope to attract Heinrich Boll or the playwright Peter Weiss for the major keynote address seems to have been a stretch of the impresarial imagination. On a more grounded plain we laid out the political line:

The basic thinking... is that it is pointless to spend time debating at any length our demands [during the meeting]. Instead, the conference will assemble with an *a priori* understanding and endorsement of demands and will spend its time in Paris trying to work out means of building support within the US for the demands.

In recognition of the blatantly Machiavellian thrust of this announcement, we added, “[t]his fact doesn’t have to be publicized before the conference.” That the “basic thinking” was shared without objection by all the members of this planning circle, and that no one complained of our heavy handedness simply underscores the combative nature of politics regardless of the ideological camp. At the same time, every group and individual we planned to invite to the conference already agreed on the demands, and so the emphasis on using our time together for strategizing on how to push our unified agenda within the U.S. body politic was both reasonable and practical. The report also struck a pedagogic note:

Owing to the distances involved we must write each other regularly with full reports of work, problems, questions, etc. Therefore, we propose... a weekly report (every Friday?) which will be sent to each other. Please discipline yourselves to do this.

The first report came from Dee Knight himself, synthesizing over three single spaced pages “the responses of [his] co-workers” at AMEX. In its detail and intensity, Knight’s letter typifies the high caliber of the correspondence that would circulate among us in the months ahead. It also demonstrates first and foremost his top priority that AMEX be supported to “supplant the competition,” the anti-amnesty “expatriate or New Canadian elements... on both liberal and ultra-left sides” in Canada’s exile community. As for the proposed conference, Knight did the math and concluded that the venue should be in Toronto, not Paris. The money

needed to transport delegates from North America to Europe would be better applied to “paying a person part time to handle more of AMEX’s production,” and to free Knight for visiting resister communities throughout Canada to subdue rivals and consolidate his political base. The candor with which Knight outlined his ambition was bracing. The problem was that he didn’t have the means to accomplish it. And Safe Return, which we had indeed committed to raising funds for the airfares to Paris of the U.S. and Canadian delegates, was neither in the position, nor - had we been - willing to underwrite Dee Knight’s fantasy at the expense of our own.

Safe Return’s work was focused on the American political scene. We did not pay close attention to the internal issues facing the Canadian resister community, nor to recent changes in emigration policy that were of immediate concern to those who had found, and were still seeking, refuge in Canada. The Trudeau government, with its conservative opposition gaining widely in the October 1972 elections, had begun to close its borders to American war resisters. Ottawa also tightened up how closely rules were followed for obtaining landed immigrant status, a policy shift aimed at deserters who often lacked the necessary qualifications. Seen from the U.S. side, these changes increased demand for amnesty among the less desirable political exiles in Canada, and helped neutralize the views of the more settled resisters who were cool toward the issue.

Wasn’t this precisely the political climate Dee Knight was hoping to encourage? Indeed it was, but for Knight and his coworkers more pressing tactical questions occupied the foreground. AMEX wished to project itself in the U.S. media - as well as at the conference that ACLU’s Henry Schwarzschild had now put off till March - as the principal voice of the resister in Canada, notwithstanding the degree to which they could or could not tip the balance of opinion among their fellow exiles.

In this effort to consolidate the resister leadership behind a unified program, Tod and I looked on AMEX as a valued ally, not a competitor. We clearly favored the group's rise within the amnesty movement. But Knight's letter on behalf of his "co-workers" exposed a thread of internecine rivalry - the source of future conflict which Tod and I failed to register or take seriously - based on Knight's strong desire to duplicate from his base in Toronto what he clearly feared as Safe Return's preeminent position around amnesty in the United States. Knight seemed to view Safe Return as a movement hybrid with some of the same prerogatives as the secular and religious liberals entrenched within the mainstream with their powerful non-profits and network of steeples throughout the land.

Knight and Jack Colhoun flooded Schwarzschild's Amnesty Project with endless demands for plane tickets and other subsidies. Now Knight pressed Safe Return to share our contacts with left-leaning foundations like the Rabinowitz and Kaplan Funds, and to advise him on how to best approach them. We were happy to oblige, having depended on neither for substantial funding. What Dee Knight completely failed to grasp was that Safe Return's fund raising success would be difficult to match, certainly from Canadian soil. In the five years of its eventual existence Safe Return would never attract much support from foundations; we were too unwilling to modify our proposals by accommodating the inevitable strings attached to grantsmanship.

Otherwise, the financial advantages we enjoyed over AMEX and other grassroots allies presented no great mystery. Our Safe Return partnership fitted a cultural frame much wider than the political arena. It had small town America written all over it, the mischief of *Peck's Bad Boys*, the guile and savvy of Spade and Archer - albeit a more companionable variant.⁴ We were two brash antiauthoritarians tapping our own wits for capital and operating on the margins of a

privileged economy cushioned by surplus. These conditions were hitched to altruistic objectives and leavened by a considerable dose of self-regard. Given that blend of personal and cultural chemistry, we were a one-of-a-kind organization whose visibility was fairly gained. We sustained ourselves by cultivating a list of small donors, many becoming repeat contributors with each Safe Return success in the media. Eventually this universe of modest givers would expand quickly through the successful use of direct mail campaigns. Knight had the talent to produce a journal of considerable value to the left wing of the amnesty movement, but to put such an enterprise on a footing that would allow him the scope of mobility he envied in Tod and me, and wanted for himself, was improbable under the circumstances.

AMEX was saddled with an overhead it could not sustain on a subscription basis - approximately 1200-1500 at that juncture - and, if I am not mistaken, to pay its bills the magazine already depended on whatever private funding Knight was able to scrape together, including small subsidies from Safe Return for one thing or another. But he wanted more, and, as alluded to above, for a year both Knight and Colhoun had been putting the moral strong arm to the ACLU's Project on Amnesty, in pursuit of what Knight described as his "dual strategy," to have AMEX recognized by the liberals as the entity speaking on behalf of the exile community in Canada, and to shake him down for money. In fact one letter that Jack Colhoun sent to Henry was so lacking in diplomacy, that Dee had to, if not apologize, follow-up with an ameliorating explanation.

In all the years I worked on amnesty, I only met Jack Colhoun once in person at a briefing we held for AMEX in Toronto on Safe Return's general strategy. The same applies to Gerry Condon, who I met once in Paris at the meeting I have described elsewhere, and who I did not encounter a second time for more than thirty years. Whereas, Colhoun, who I found more

interesting than most, perhaps because we shared scholarly inclinations, I have never seen again. In the letter to Henry, fearing his partner had killed a golden goose, Knight was quick to redeem him. Colhoun was under pressure, wrote Knight, having recently cleared his orals, and hoped to complete his doctorate under Gabriel Kolko's mentorship in two years. He was looking toward the future. And so, alongside his ham fisted overture to wrangle funds, Jack had appended a request that Henry consult with his "good guy general friends" about how long a sentence they would demand for Jack if he chose to turn himself in. Colhoun was willing to cut an individual deal with the Army - which was his right - but was particularly concerned that he not be sent to a general prison population policed by "sadistic drill sergeants." Was there a stockade for officers, Colhoun had asked Henry to inquire?

A letter from George and Lew, missing or misplaced in the record, finally arrived just past mid-November. It is referred to in the reply Tod and I dispatched the same day, hoping our letter would intercept George before he traveled on conference business to meet with American exiles, their supporters and with active duty antiwar GIs in other parts of Europe. We enclosed a list of contacts, to include a reporter friend with *Agence France Presse* and the ubiquitous Paris crowd, Heflin and Maria Jolas. Madame Jolas had written offering her help in finding a meeting hall for the conference, and agreed, reluctantly, to ask her friends to provide hospitality for some of our delegates. Emphasizing that Jolas' "exposure to deserters has been disastrous," Carrano was to "assure her on the seriousness of this activity; that there will be positively NO DRUGS, etc." A draft of our conference proposal would be forwarded to Paris, and in George and Lew's hands by the following week we promised. And we urged their immediate reply with comments and criticism so we could move to consensus rapidly, and go ahead with the necessary fund

raising and announcement to allies in the Movement. As to Dee's proposal to shift the conference to Toronto, we wrote we still favored Europe, but would 'honor a majority decision.'

A week later came a second envelope from George and Lew with the translation of a long article from the Stockholm daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, headlined "Sweden a Disappointment, U.S. Deserters Want to Go Home."⁵ It confirmed the views we already held. The reporter was evaluating the general circumstances of the 450 American war resisters who remained in Sweden, down from a population that had once peaked at 700. Some had been there since 1967 when a Social Democratic government, deeply disapproving of the American invasion of Vietnam, had first offered itself as a refuge for war resisters.

There had always been many more self-retired veterans - at least 75% - than draft refusers. Without once mentioning race, the reporter described what anyone with insider knowledge understood as the self-imposed segregation in Sweden between black and white deserters. When the reporter wrote about the deserters in Malmo not doing well, it was known that this was the black colony. The majority of the exiles, mostly whites, concentrated around Stockholm, with another small group living in Gothenburg. This racial self-segregation was a replica of a similar pattern in the armed forces, where, among militants, the separatism of Black Power now trumped the passive resistance of the Civil Right Movement's quest for integration. The G.I. resistance was widespread, but radical black and white soldiers essentially conducted separate struggles against the brass, with occasional cross-currents of solidarity, especially from the more advanced white GI radicals who recognized that racial degradation was a component of their fight as well.

And, following another pattern endemic to U.S. society, the sixty predominantly black deserters in Malmo were doing a whole lot less well than, say, the twenty mostly white draft

resisters in Gothenburg, whose “members work together under a loose counter-cultural umbrella called Sister Love.” The resister majority, “perhaps 80% of the 450, would choose to return to the United States if the possibility were open to them,” the reporter reckoned. Of these, he reported that 10-15% of the Malmo community was “more or less broken down mentally and/or socially.” And finally, the writer observed that, “[t]he original broad based American Deserters Committee (ADC) from 1967 is today a radical leftist grouplet which sees as its prime mission carrying on a revolutionary struggle...” This was the very “grouplet” that Lew and George were challenging for leadership with the creation of Up From Exile.

With November drawing to a close, Tod and I finally completed and dispatched a three paged memorandum to our collaborators detailing the political *raison d'être* for the approaching conference. These were marching orders in the form of an internal document, not the limited public call that would follow. It's a power letter, more in the voice of the union boss than the shop steward, and makes clear who's in charge and who's not. Our hubris was due perhaps to an excess of willful pride in our own abilities and successes. I now see this document as Tod and I flaunting our preeminence in the coalition pecking order. But I believe we were quite unconscious of this dimension. Had we been more psychologically developed we would have tried to manufacture, rather than dictate, consent. Naturally the others came to harbor resentments, which, when later expressed, would knock Safe Return down a peg or two. Still, despite the overbearing tone of this uber-text, the inter-group discussion remained spirited, and all differences were openly discussed and debated. Core agreement surrounding most the conference details was already strong among us, otherwise the alliance would never have gotten as far as it did. We all had a stake in the process. The proposal is worth quoting extensively. The Leninist ‘What Is to Be Done’ tone is unconscious, but not accidental. This style was the air

so many breathed in the New Left then, and the yoking of one's practice to the revolutionary struggle was often, as here, stated explicitly.

November, 28, 1972

Prologue: We suggested an international conference from a felt need to achieve unity if our work is to go forward.... The relationship between ourselves - excluding the liberals - is organic in theory and must be concretized in form and content.

We are not united with the liberals by principles and goals, but merely by coincidence. We understand the centrality of the amnesty issue in the post-war years. The liberals' historical role is to defuse movement and reconcile latent revolutionary forces. Ours is to build a serious movement and provide leadership and direction to those forces. Though their role is antagonistic to ours, we both appear, at present, to be pursuing the same objective - an unconditional, universal amnesty.

Our main advantage is that our program represents the best interests of all war resisters, and, unlike the liberals, is irreducible. If we can unite among ourselves and begin to project a real presence within the amnesty arena, we stand an excellent chance of winning the support of most, if not all, war resisters. Regular work to unite more and more of the "backward" resister elements within our ranks should be an internal struggle, to the extent possible. Direct and public confrontation with "backward" resister groups would be as harmful as direct public confrontation with the pro-amnesty liberals... a bridge to enormous numbers of Americans who are potentially sympathetic.

Reasons why a conference SHOULD be held in Paris

The proposed conference in Paris is not intended to unite the badly-factionalized exile communities. Its purpose is to unite the leadership emerging from the resister experience around a program that will itself be the vehicle for uniting the various communities. It will also be a media event that exists to be recorded. The media doesn't usually distinguish between leadership and base anyway... It is not a conference to try to win over opponents... a central concern of the conference is impact in the U.S... Parenthetically, it should be added that it's *not* a conference to swap problems or gripes about exile life. Safe Return is concerned with building an amnesty movement within the U.S. Exile groups, of course, have to concern themselves with conditions within their country of refuge - but that's not the focus of this conference.

We have spent three years working directly with national media within the U.S. It's our opinion that Paris provides a better potential for the desired impact than Canada. Canada is drab, has a lack of international flavor for the U.S. public and media. This is especially true of Toronto which is really just a clean Cleveland, sans Blacks.

A word about finances. We have obtained a fare of \$230 per person for the U.S. contingent. This means a cost of \$3,290 based on 13 people... If one figures \$100 travel per person from the U.S. to Toronto, you're only saving a maximum of \$2,000 anyway. This conference is too important to be deterred or detoured by such (relatively) paltry sums. As far as we can see, all other costs would be the same.

Book possibilities are better with a Paris venue. The sale of the transcript is a big question mark anyway - but a keynote by a European personality... would help greatly.

The conference is merely the first step in what, hopefully, will evolve into active collaboration between exile and U.S. groups... A sequel conference may be desired as conditions develop and change. At some point we may want to hold this in Canada.

This gesture to soften the put-down on Toronto with an indulgent nod toward - even drab - Canada for some future event - was pure condescension, since no such conference was being discussed. But the cheap shot toward AMEX was unfortunate. We were getting a laugh at their expense, these wiseacre hipsters in the great metropolis south of the border. The creative compatible sides of our friendship notwithstanding, Tod and I could also reinforce each others' darker, aggressive tendencies, forming a classic bond of co-dependency. Which is not to suggest that either of us felt guilty about the way we sometimes misbehaved. I claim again, insistently, that we were scamps on the hoof, not overly concerned about who we pissed off, or pissed on, for that matter. We were both living lives we could have never imagined as restless teenage malcontents growing up under our respective provincial skies. To give the impression that we were always edgy and calculating, however, would also be false. The opposite was equally true. What we did involved enormously pleasurable acts of improvisation, and we reveled in that aspect. Moreover, on any given day, we conducted ourselves quite civilly, and often with considerable charm.

Over the next several months the letters flowed back and forth, with the occasional minor squall blowing in from one corner or another of our incipient coalition. We heard from George Carrano in the first days of December that he and Lew Simon were “leaving in a few hours” for Paris. Carrano “promises” to write us daily on the trip, which might take them to England and Germany as well. Reporting on the most recent meeting among the deserters in Stockholm, he had consolidated 80% of those present to support the Safe Return 5 Points over the minority rival “and his condottiere,” who would only accept amnesty if Lyndon Johnson were first tried for war crimes.⁶

Carrano next takes up an “internal problem” that he finds it necessary to “burden” us with, “a less than benign contradiction between Lew’s private and public views” on amnesty. It seems Lew was filmed telling an NBC reporter that he might accept some form of “alternative service,” like a “domestic peace corps.” Carrano expresses concern over how this apostasy will play throughout exile circles. His friend, he says, is free to decide for himself the path and resolution of his own exile, but he will now seek to “tone down Lew’s role in Up From Exile.” Lew’s statement might undermine Up’s “status” as a convener of the international conference, he fears.

This was indeed disturbing news as we had great hopes for Lew Simon, one of the most sympathetic and well-spoken of all the activist deserters. But Carrano also divulged another thread of conspiracy that, by contrast, stroked our egos. Two American women, movement activists, had been working with the U.S. exiles in Sweden, one of whom, we had been told, was loosely affiliated with the ACLU Amnesty Project, and the other with the Philadelphia-based CCCO.⁷ In the matter of constituencies, CCCO was to draft resisters and military COs what Safe Return was to deserters, although their organization had been around much longer. Both

groups were staffed by stalwart opponents to the Vietnam War, but we competed on the amnesty turf for influence and donations. It was the whiff of righteous martyrdom in their resistance ideology that was so abhorrent to confirmed sensualists like my partner and I. We were no doubt thrilled therefore to read Carrano's message that a certain Candi "has written to her former CCCO co-workers.... that, on amnesty, the deserters in Sweden look to SR in the States as the organization which best speaks in their interest."

The regular flow of 'weekly reports' was now firmly established. Except for poor conflicted Lew Simon, there were no other fading violets in the chorus. Each voice or team of voices transcribed its views with the self-confidence and authority of ranking members of the Politburo. Both AMEX and UP contributed reports of estimable volume and quality. Any underlying tone of internecine rivalry had quite suddenly vanished from the texts. Differences over Paris as the venue had been laid to rest. It was as if the formula sign-off - *Power, Love* - then much in fashion for internal Movement correspondence, and now duly planted just above the signatures on each group's weekly dispatch, was migrating in emphasis from the former to the latter.⁸ And yet, these exchanges are also dense with subplots and pet agendas, all the more appreciated from a distance of many decades.

Between December 7th and 14th, Safe Return issued and distributed the formal call and proposal for the conference, the product of our inter-group consultations to date. The conference document was straight forward on the event's purpose and structure, as already agreed upon. As a proposal, it would be mailed to a dozen U.S. groups, each being invited to send a delegate, for most of them at the expense of the conveners, and to a half dozen small left wing foundations to solicit the eight thousand dollars, roughly budgeted, to cover expenses. The amount was inflated, Tod and I confided to our comrades; "we can do this thing on a lot less." And, what

with AMEX operating on a shoe string, we suggested that “perhaps some of the fund-raising effort” could “redound” to them. To this we added the caveat that, “certainly the future of AMEX-CANADA is a very important question; also, of course, Jack and Dee’s continued work with all of us is essential. However, we have a number of questions about the magazine, its audience, its present content, etc. that we feel should be discussed in depth.”

This was hardly a takeover move; we all understood that AMEX’s existence depended largely on Dee Knight’s initiative and know-how. Tod and I were critical of the magazine’s amateurish layout and threadbare design, but we had no real arrangement in mind to remedy that. We had gone no further than a vague discussion with the others around an idea to make AMEX the “voice of the amnesty movement in the U.S.,” as well as Canada. Dee’s response to our “questions about the magazine” was lucid. While he “appreciated” Safe Returns offer, he advised us to “not harbor illusions about ease of editorial collaboration with these ridiculous barriers of time and distance.” The matter went no farther. I’m quite certain, however, that we would never have actually given AMEX any of the money Safe Return worked so hard to raise unless we believed it would benefit our U.S. amnesty campaign at least as much as Knight’s magazine.

In the AMEX weekly report, cosigned by Jack Colhoun, Dee notes that Gerry Condon, with his collaborator and companion in Vancouver, a woman named Sandy Rutherford, “were missed on recent reports.” Whether this was intended or not, I can no longer recall. It’s true that Gerry wasn’t much in my sights or Tod’s, and we had no strong motivation to engage him at this moment. We certainly considered Gerry a junior and nonessential member of the coalition, and consistently underestimated him.

Not so, Dee Knight. Condon was very much on his radar. Knight devotes a third of his three paged letter updating his new west coast protégée on developments within Canada's exile groups, sharing contacts, and urging Gerry to direct his organizing energies toward "un-landed deserters," the cover story, Dee informs us all, for the next issue of AMEX. Offering political advice, Knight warns Condon to avoid as "a bag of worms" the Trotskyist faction currently dominating the Canadian antiwar movement, which is "not capable of mobilizing anybody."

The same official heirs of Leon Trotsky's political legacy predominated in the U.S. antiwar movement, the Socialist Worker Party. Anyone not in the SWP was critical of it; but as the enormous numbers of protesters who gathered in Washington in those years, as late as 1972, could testify, the party's ability to mobilize was precisely its strength. I now realize the possibility that Dee Knight, as later in life, was himself already under discipline to a rival Trotskyist faction, and perhaps hid that from us. Since Tod and I consorted in New York with individuals in most of these groups, and found only one or two of them truly toxic, it is unlikely this would have altered our relationship to Knight and his magazine, and was certainly not as a deal breaker.

One comment in Knight's letter that no doubt provided Tod and I with a welcome payback moment was his observation that Henry Schwarzschild, whom he had talked with by phone, "sounded pretty jarred receiving first word of [our] conference by mail," in the form of the official call sent to allies being invited to attend. We have "elicited a yelp from the wounded beast," we boasted in our own report, but "let us not gloat." We still hope "to be strongly visible within [Henry's] D.C. conference." But Henry continued to keep us in the dark about his plans, so we were happy to reciprocate.

While Knight's prose is clipped and business-like, George Carrano approaches his co-conveners, especially SR, in a deferential tone that partially camouflages his considerable competence and suggests, perhaps, a measure of passive aggression. He had not written every day during his travels as promised, though none of us expected this. But his one letter in the week under examination was dense with tantalizing news and gossip, and with reports of real progress on conference logistics for Paris. If Knight was at times overbearing in expressing his views, Carrano was the classic conspirator, playing all sides while advancing his own agenda. Carrano treaded lightly with Tod and I for several reasons. UP had hitched its wagon to Safe Return which proved the correct political move at the time, and he saw himself as something of an affiliate. He also wrote that he wanted to come to New York and work on amnesty full time. All legal obstacles to his return had been removed, how, we would only learn later. Now, as the coalition's ambassador to the exile community in Europe, as well as its conference field organizer, it was as if George were auditioning for a job.

Carrano had traveled to Paris with his close buddy Lew Simon, despite his private criticisms of his friend's political inconsistencies. What the two men accomplished there, although the work has Carrano's personal stamp all over it, sounded impressive. George wrote that he had managed to consolidate support among the few remaining members of the Paris deserter community; had outflanked Joe Heflin, confining his participation in the conference to "some minor practical arrangements;" arranged for free use of a meeting room courtesy of France's second largest union confederation, the CFDT, whose celebrated socialist co-thinker, the former French Prime Minister Pierre Mendes France, was now being sought as our primary keynote speaker; and convinced Fritz Efaw, a Roger Williams' lieutenant with the exile group in

Britain, also visiting Paris then, to sever his group's affiliation with the ultraleftist ACE coalition as well as their recent merger with the irrelevant Joe Heflin.

Carrano had pointed out to Efaw that Heflin, a draft resister but not under indictment, had no claim to leadership of the Paris dwindling deserter base. Moreover the two remaining deserters with developed antiwar politics, Steve Cobb and Jose Claudio, would soon be departing permanently for Stockholm, the latter under an order of expulsion having just completed a short prison term for petty larceny. The alliances Efaw's group had only recently established were attributed by Carrano to the fact that Efaw and his mates in London had been "anxious to end [their] isolation." Efaw now realized, according to Carrano, that meant realigning themselves, like AMEX and Up, with Safe Return. Having placated Heflin, and seduced Efaw, Carrano goes on to characterize them in less than flattering terms, the former having a manner of "a paternal southern banker," while the latter, who showed up in Paris sporting a Red Army great coat, was a leftist in fashion only. Despite these harsh characterizations, we were reassured that Carrano's relationship with both men was "warm," and "friendly."

As for Maria Jolas, Carrano had reported that she could "provide us with little concrete help," concluding that "she is senile to some extent." Based on my own contact with Jolas, I saw Carrano here revealing his limited capacity for distinguishing between senility and eccentricity. Another American expat "we do not like," but who "provided us with the best meal we have had since we came to Europe," he described as "a young version of Maria Jolas." This was Susan George, in subsequent years a prominent political scientist and president of the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute. Like Jolas, she told Carrano, she had been too often "burned" by her involvement with deserters. Moreover she had no interest in Heflin, nor "what he has to say." In his dealings with Susan George, Carrano also apparently managed to mask his

contempt, because she offered our enterprise considerable help, from English to French interpretation at the conference to finding a hotel with a “cheap group rate” for our delegates. She also promised to contact Mendes France on our behalf. Carrano was proving himself a first rate advance man, and, as an in-fighter, a perfect fit for a staff position with Safe Return where we prized self-starting competence over a need for close supervision.

As for the official conference document now in circulation, the schedule and agenda were simply boiler plated from the previous exchanges of correspondence. Novel, and of some significance, were an extensive preamble with “historical notes” on amnesty in the U.S., followed by an analysis of the issue’s prospects in the current political climate. It began:

America’s tradition of amnesty can be divided roughly into two periods. The first dates from the founding of the Republic in 1776 to the Spanish American War and can be labeled the Era of Reconciliation. The second period, which we term the Punitive Era, began roughly with World War I and continues to the present.

This was followed by a summary of the amnesties granted or not granted during these two periods, touching on the precedent we favored, Andrew Johnson’s full amnesty for southern rebels after the Civil War, and ending with Harry Truman’s Amnesty Board after World War II which granted pardons to only 10% of the 15,000 applicants. Regarding the latter, we noted that, “While 60 % of WWII veterans favored an amnesty for resisters, the Truman Administration used the issue as another means of building Cold War sentiment.”

It was essentially that same “sentiment” that complicated the contemporary struggle to gain amnesty for resisters to the Vietnam War. Our prediction was that, “in the coming year [1973], assuming that Nixon is able to reach an accommodation with the Vietnamese through his Air War blackmail, we think it likely that his administration will propose some sort of limited

amnesty.” Noting that “their” amnesty will “certainly exclude military resisters,” and demand “alternative service” as a price for repatriation by draft evaders, Nixon would further “obscure the scope of the problem,” and ignore “the 540,000 GIs who have received less-than-honorable discharges since 1963 mainly for acts of resistance to the war and racism.” We cared less that this last assertion reflected reality than that it stood for a general point of view that defended an stance against the rigid authoritarianism of the military.

It was our fear that Nixon would act, however narrowly and punitively, “to help usher in a post-war feeling... reconciling a bitterly divided populace and perhaps slowly winning back the... allegiance of many younger Americans... After all,” we argued, “if some of the more acceptable classes of resisters are allowed to come home (after returning most troops - not materiel or advisors) the war does in fact seem like past history.” Such action would not only allow Nixon the “means of defusing... a broadly based independent movement,” but, “constrained only by the limits of technological weaponry operated by U.S. ‘volunteers’... [and] Asian mercenary forces... ensure the continued ‘independence’ of [South] Vietnam.”

On December 18th within a week of our document’s dissemination, Nixon launched Operation Linebacker II, a ten-day onslaught comprising the war’s most savage and concentrated aerial attack on Hanoi and nearby Haiphong Harbor that came to be known as the Christmas Bombings of 1972. The antiwar movement instantaneously mobilized worldwide, not least in the United States. Given that Nixon’s negotiations with the Vietnamese in Paris had stalled, and Le Duc Tho, Hanoi’s chief negotiator had led his delegation away from the table, it was generally assumed that the war was about to enter another phase of its interminable horrors.

Strangely, there is only a single mention of this savage blitzkrieg in the conference correspondence among our three groups. We had urged George Carrano to contact members of

the GI resistance at a U.S. airbase in Britain, and seek their participation at the conference, in particular to address the recent bombardment of Hanoi. In pouring over the conference-related documents in the Safe Return record, it appears obvious that, however the collaborators as individuals may have related to the Movement's actions in our respective countries of residence - for I am certain that if there were demonstrations or meetings in New York in response to the Christmas Bombings, Tod and I would have been in attendance - our tactical concentration on the organizing tasks before us kept our commentary on amnesty's strategic relationship to the war in the background.

Our immediate agenda at Safe Return involved preparations for a fund raiser at the Gramercy Park apartment belonging to a staunch supporter, at which Dan Berrigan would be the principle draw, but was also to be attended by Lew Simon's parents from Queens. Since we could not depend on even Leftist foundations to provide the support we needed to underwrite our plans for Paris, we leaned all the more on small scale undertakings to raise the necessary funds. A report on the outcome of the party was sent to the resister Roger Williams in London by a man named Al Reynolds who had been in attendance, and who covered us with a copy of his letter. Al was an antiwar engineer from Texas who had been a civilian contractor in Vietnam, and was now in New York working on the foundation of the World Trade Towers, just then under construction. According to Al, "Michael, looking like a left wing Episcopalian Rector, passed among the guests with a plate and they literally jumped to contribute, checks, tens, etc." Tod confirmed the event's success in a letter to George and Lew, writing that, "We raised \$1,100 at the Gramercy Park party. Abe [Lew's father] spoke to the crowd."

A week later we were able to report that, “the fundraising is going quite well... We’ll be able to send a full U.S. delegation.” Meanwhile, back in Sweden, George Carrano dispatched a quick note to add a few details to his earlier letter from Paris. Of major interest to the conference agenda was the contact he had made through Susan George with an academic at the Sorbonne who offered a presentation on the amnesty movements in France that had followed both the French Indochina and Algerian Wars. The experience with Algeria resonated in particular with the current Vietnam-related campaign owing to the high desertion rates tied to widespread French opposition to that war which raged in the Fifties, ending only in 1962.

George also now referred to another meeting he had earlier neglected to mention with a Canadian film maker, one Marvin Bernstein, who had arrived from London in the company of Fritz Efav with a letter of introduction from Dee Knight. Bernstein was in Europe to shoot footage for his planned documentary, “In Exile,” seeking entree to the resister community in Sweden, and expressing interest in remaining to incorporate segments of the conference into his film as well. “Has this been cleared with you,” Carrano inquired? The answer was, not exactly. In fact, Tod had already asked his girlfriend Pam Booth to assemble a video team to shoot the event in order to allow us some control over the final cut. But given Bernstein’s endorsement by Knight, we were willing to allow his participation, learning only later of his antipathy toward Safe Return and his efforts to undermine our credibility, especially among certain resentful exile elements.

As 1972 was drawing to a close, AMEX was now at work on its special “conference” edition which also contained a long article by Tommy Michaud on his experiences “organizing the brothers” in the Camp Lejeune stockade. In late December Tommy now wrote us that he had been transferred to the Portsmouth Naval prison in Kittery, Maine, “finally here surrounded by

water and snow,” and “very comfortable” in his native New England element. His prose had become amazingly coherent, as if he had undergone a major intellectual transformation. He was reading the most demanding texts “of the Russian Revolution of 1917, of Marx’s early works with Engels... I’m very surprised that this country,” referring to the U.S., “has yet to have its Paris Commune. Will it ever be possible someday that people can live as people and not slaves to kings, czars, presidents and capitalists? Someday yes I’m sure of it.” He signed off touchingly, “In Portsmouth and in peace. Tom.”

From Steve Hawkins, coordinator of VVAW’s national office in Chicago, came news of his organization’s intractable internal problems by way of explanation for their inability to establish a clear policy position on the amnesty issue. According to Hawkins, VVAW was split seven ways to Sunday, with various chapters subject to pressures from the sectarian Left. “PL [Progressive Labor] has just ripped off our fund raising list for NYC... we had trouble with 2 of our office people concerning their love affair interfering with our work... There are internal problems with Gainesville which I don’t wish to discuss here... So much for the general hassles.”⁹ Furthermore their coordinators were scattered across the country, and one, Barry Romo, was actually in Hanoi, and would witness firsthand the devastation of the Christmas Bombings on that city’s civilian population.

Hawkins expected that VVAW would work out its “line” on amnesty at the group’s upcoming national steering committee meeting in early January 1973. He emphasized the need “to educate our membership and mobilize them to understand the importance of the issue.” But this effort was further undermined by the fact that the West coast member who maintained “all the files and info on deserters and amnesty groups that he met in Canada... has refused to turn any of the materials over to anyone so we are pretty much in the dark.” The one bright spot was

“this brother from Detroit” who had brought him “several hundred pages” of amnesty-related documents. The brother in question was Eddie Sowders, who had served as a medic in Vietnam in 1966, and with whom I had been corresponding since the previous September. From where Tod and I sat it had become obvious that Ed was the only member of VVAW we knew of who clearly grasped amnesty’s political value to the antiwar movement. On that basis over the succeeding months a consensus had been building among the conference conveners that the “brother from Detroit” was the right person to invite to Paris as the VVAW representative.

In the years ahead, Ed Sowders would come to play an important role at Safe Return, and his story is taken up separately in Chapter 9. As of December 1972, however, we were still unaware of the one major complication that would prevent Ed’s travel to Paris. The day after Christmas, I boarded a plane for Detroit to spend several days with Ann and her family. Ed and I had also agreed to meet during my stay, and it was only then that I was to learn that Ed Sowders had deserted from the Army two years before, and had been living underground in Detroit ever since.

1. "Descent into the Maelstrom: Notes on a journey to hell," Roger Williams. AMEX-CANADA, p.24. Sept. 1, 1972. Vol. 3, No. 5.

3. I'm fairly certain, based on internal evidence - a preponderance of adverbs, the number of misspellings in the archived carbon-set copy [here corrected], and the liberal use of embedded clauses - this latter still characteristic of my need to often shade and qualify some assertion - pinpoint my authorship of this particular screed. The way we worked was that one of us would write a draft, and the other would edit or suggest changes where he felt they were needed. For example, the tax write-off line might have been added by Tod. All correspondence, unless it was personal, was mailed under both our signatures.

6. Five points. TK AMEX ob. cit. p.31.

7. CCCO stands for Central Committee for Conscientious Objection, and was based in Philadelphia at that time.