

January 5, 1970

Mrs. Frances W. Herring
East Bay Women for Peace
261 Purdue Avenue
Berkeley, California 94708

Dear Mrs. Herring:

I have just now rediscovered your letter of November 4 after misplacing it all these weeks. I am terribly sorry that it went unanswered.

I hope that East Bay Women for Peace will continue to press for an end to all forms of chemical warfare. The President's important decision to forswear all forms of germ warfare and to submit the 1925 Geneva Protocol to the Senate can go a long way to rid the World of the threat of chemical and biological warfare. However, his initiatives may have relatively little beneficial influence and could even do harm if their purchase at the price of legitimizing the unrestrained use of harassing gases and anti-plant chemicals. The use of these agents has been deplored by a majority of the members of the United Nations in a resolution passed December 16, 1969. Only the United States, Australia and Portugal ~~voted~~ ~~against~~ this resolution which was supported by 81 nations at the United Nations General Assembly. It is very important to oppose chemical warfare in any form. Its employment erodes the general expectation that gas will not be used in combat. As a result, nations throughout the World are encouraged to consider creating or expanding their chemical warfare capabilities. Once chemical weapons are widespread in the arsenals of many nations the chance for an outbreak of chemical warfare and its escalation to the use of deadly gases is greatly increased. The United States can only lose by such a development. Our long-range interest is clearly to put an end to all use of chemical weapons. Even from a strictly military point of view it cannot be shown that their use in Viet Nam is of any great advantage. Beyond that, the spraying of anti-plant chemicals over an area approximately equal with that of the entire state of Massachusetts could be causing an ecological disaster. We

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simply do not know. Especially alarming, is the recent finding that one of the principle chemicals used for defoliation in Viet Nam, 2,4,5-T causes birth defects in rats and mice. This finding has led the United States Government to withdraw this chemical from agricultural uses in the United States. Only last week at its Boston meeting, the American Association for the Advancement of Science voted overwhelmingly to urge the Defense Department to cease using this chemical and the related substance 2,4-D in Viet Nam. It may be that the Administration feels it would be politically hazardous to stop using these weapons in Viet Nam even if their military effectiveness is not very great. If so, it is important that groups like yours demonstrate the opposite. Namely, that the U.S. public would prefer the United States to refrain from chemical warfare in all of its forms. I enclose for your possible interest an article on "The Escalation of Chemical Warfare" by Julian Robinson and myself. I also enclose a copy of a talk I recently gave in London.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson

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