

feature

Liddy:

Watergate conspirator makes mark in film

One of the more interesting personalities in attendance at Festival of Festivals a few weeks ago, was none other than convicted Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy.

Liddy, who spent 21 months in a District of Columbia jail and recently wrote an autobiography entitled *Will*, was in town to promote a documentary film he is starring in called *Return Engagement*. Directed by Alan Rudolph (*Welcome to L.A.*, *Roadie*), the film was shot during a series of debates about the American dream which toured U.S. colleges. In these debates, Liddy, the tight-lipped Watergate burglar, was pitted against Timothy Leary, the loose-lipped high priest of Acid.

The film depicts the absurd extremes which are contained within American life. Leary represents the "drop out" counter-culture, while Liddy portrays the great conservative American patriot who is willing to commit a crime for the love of his country.

Excalibur reporter Howard Goldstein managed to obtain an exclusive interview with the former White House aide.



Timothy Leary (at piano) and G. Gordon Liddy in a scene from their film, *Return Engagement*.

In the film you mention that you might have considered killing an innocent bystander, if he or she had interfered with one of your break-ins?

If you remember, though, I made a distinction between two break-ins in the film. One was the break-in of the office of Dr. Fielding who was the psychiatrist who in the past had treated Mr. Ellsberg. The other break-in was the Watergate Office Building.

The break-in of the psychiatrist's office was national security operation and I was armed at the time—and I would think that in an extreme situation where there was absolutely no other recourse, I might have had to deploy armament there. On the other hand, during the Watergate break-in, because it had absolutely nothing to do with the security of the United States—it was purely a political intelligence operation—not only would I not have done anything like that; nobody was even permitted to be armed during it, because it certainly would not be justifiable.

Is it fair to say that you equate national security with circumstances which contribute to the "common good"?

Well yes, except that it is my view that a private citizen cannot get down and decide what is the common good and then go ahead and engage in what is essentially a government activity. He has not been elected to do so.

If you are with the government on the other hand, then you are acting for and on behalf of someone who the people have charged with deciding formally, what is in fact the "common good."

When an innocent person must die for the "common good," doesn't it make one reconsider just how good this so-called "common good" is?

What you have is the same ethical problem as was presented in the second world war. You are a bombardier for either the RAF or the American Air Force and you are sent to bomb the Messerschmitt factory at Augsburg, and intelligence tells you to take particular care because very close by is an orphanage. Now you know, as a matter of statistical probability, that the air currents being such between 8,000 feet and the ground, that some of these bombs will stray and there is a very strong possibility, if not a probability, that there will be damage to the orphanage.

It is called the principle of the unintended secondary cause. If you cannot reconcile yourself with something like that, then you cannot be a bombardier.

Can you extend this "that's the price you must pay" attitude to the two nuclear bombs on Japan as well?

First of all, let us remember that more died in the First Storm Raid of Dresden than in either the first or second droppings of an atomic bomb. And those were conventional bombs. Secondly, I would say as a matter of principle, that it really doesn't matter how one is killed. One is either justified in killing or is not. As long as it is not done with the deliberate infliction of pain and cruelty, then I don't think it is relevant how it is done—whether it is with a cross-bow or with an atomic bomb.

Third, the purpose of dropping the bomb was to avoid having to take the home islands of Japan by storm with infantry. We had before us the extraordinary record of courage and heroism of the Imperial Japanese forces in the Pacific Islands, and the enormous amount of deaths which took place just in capturing the non-home islands of Japan. And it is estimated that it could take a year or more to take the home islands of Japan conventionally, and the loss of life would have been extraordinary. So they dropped the first bomb, and hoped that that would end it. But it didn't. So they dropped the second one and that did end it.

How do you respond to those who feel negatively towards intelligence gathering?

In the United States historically we've had people who believed that intelligence is a dirty business, and we ought not to have anything to do with it. As a matter of fact, in the year 1933, the year Adolph Hitler came to power, the U.S. Secretary of State took the position that gentlemen ought not to read other gentlemen's mail. So what rudimentary intelligence we had was dismantled thus. We fell into Pearl Harbour and events like that, then they organized the office of strategic services which was the precursor to the CIA.

We have a history in the United States of closing the barn door after the horse has left, or of waiting for some horrendous incident like Pearl Harbour, before we energize ourselves to protect ourselves. I consider that to be imprudent.

In the film it would seem by your juxtaposition with Timothy Leary that you are supposed to be representing the right wing element in America. Do you share the American right's suspicion and concern with anything left of centre?

There is no problem in theory, with a government being socialist or even communist, as far as I am concerned—so long as by communism we do not mean a government or party that is under the domination, direction, and control of the Soviet Union. We know from the experience of Yugoslavia that that is not necessarily so. Nor, I think, does any educated person in the United States equivocate the government of Francois Mitterand in France—which is avowedly socialist—with any sort of dangerous situation vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. I should hope we know enough not to worry about that.

My own view is that socialism, historically, has not worked well at all as a method of generating wealth. It works very well as a method of redistributing wealth. The problem is once you redistribute the wealth that has been generated by capitalism, through the avenue of socialism, you then go broke. Socialism cannot, will not, and does not generate any new wealth; it is contrary to the nature of man.

If some particular country chooses to invoke upon itself a socialist government and goes broke, I sympathize with them, but not the extent that I think they should come to me, running a capitalist country, to borrow the money to bail themselves out.

You do, though, think that some redistribution of wealth is necessary?

You have in the United States redistribution of wealth by the government to the extent that there is some socialism already. The debate that goes on in government, is merely about the extent thereof. You have a very delicate balance there. At what point do you step over the line, where it becomes impossible to generate new wealth?

I'll give you an example: prior to the ascent to power of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, if you were to go to London you would have found it awash in Rolls Royces. Yet Great Britain was nearly bankrupt

economically and I assure you those Rolls Royces were not all owned by Arab sheiks.

The reason for that is prior to the Thatcher government if one had in one's possession 100,000 pounds sterling, which is what a Rolls Royce costs, and it was digressionary to do with it what you will—you didn't need it to eat in other words—if you were to put it to work in any form of investment at all, the tax structure, because of this redistribution business, was such that you would be permitted to retain, at most, the equivalent of \$300 Canadian.

That being the case the person who is possessed of this wealth says, "Why should I bother putting it to work? I'll buy a Rolls Royce and enjoy it." So the sources of investment capital were dried up by the folly of socialism.

From your position that one must act to further the common good of one's nation, could one not construct an argument in favor of the Soviet Union's recent actions in shooting down a passenger plane, particularly if there was reason to believe spying was going on?

First of all the fact of the matter is that there wasn't any spying going on. Secondly, they did not have reason to believe that spying was going on. The Soviets were very well aware of the fact that the United States maintains a fleet of KC-135's spy planes which they deploy for that very purpose—electronic intelligence. The only other thing you can use aircraft for productively in terms of espionage, is photography. And this whole situation took place at 3:00 a.m. in pitch blackness, and there isn't a camera yet invented that can take pictures in those circumstances that are of any value.

How do you feel about charges that you have gone from criminal to entertainer. Do you think there is something wrong with the showbiz nature in which the film depicts you?

You must know from your university experience that your effective professors are the ones who manage to entertain as well as inform. That is, they keep you awake and interested by being lively.