
THE PUBLIC CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS INTO THE IRAN/Contragate affair have ended, revealing far more about the investigators than about their targets.

True, the Committee did throw a spotlight on the utter lawlessness of certain (but far from all those culpable) high government officials and their agents, their contempt for and disregard of the Constitution and democratic processes; did expose some of the Administration's lies to Congress and the American people, and the deceit and double-dealing even between members of the Administration; did uncover the petty greed parading as patriotism of a few arms dealers (but not the ravenous and insatiable greed of the military-industrial complex); and did portray the disarray of a presidency entangled in its own hypocritical rhetoric.

But the hearing committee permitted the public no more than a glimpse into a small corner of the Government cesspool.

The hearings, for example, avoided exposing the pervasive involvement of the CIA in the Iran/Contragate conspiracy. Evidently, there is consensus within the Establishment on the need to protect the CIA from a repetition of the adverse publicity and subsequent modest restraints imposed on the Agency in the aftermath of the Watergate affair.

And the full scope of North's activities in the Nicaraguan intervention, his use of a secret military unit, his role in the mining of the harbor and other dirty deeds against Nicaragua, remained closed to public scrutiny. Nor were his covert activities in Southern Africa and other areas of "low-intensity warfare"—equally lawless and equally barbarous—the subject of congressional curiosity.

Unpublicized, too, was the political background of many of the cast of characters in Iran/Contragate, a number of whom had worked together as far back as the Bay of Pigs, and whom the Christic Institute has dubbed the "Secret Team"—a gang of Right-wing adventurers and mercenaries who have left a sordid trail of subversion, assassination and terror in their wake.

Further, the role of El Salvador as a staging area for Nicaraguan subversion was presented in a whisper. The Government had told us previously that the situation was quite the reverse, that US intervention began in an effort to interdict the supposed flow of Nicaraguan arms to the El Salvador guerrillas.

And only very reluctantly, on the last day of the hearings, did the Committee touch upon the Israeli arms shipments to Iran which went back as far as 1981, and failed to pursue the strange situation of

the US client state flagrantly violating under Washington's complacent eyes the very arms embargo the US was urging on its European allies.

The Committee all but ignored the bombshells exploding in the Establishment media concerning the US-organized drug traffic that is financing the Contra and other covert wars, an operation that is producing a perfect blend of terror abroad and "pacification" here at home.

One of the most damning revelations to emerge in the Establishment media in connection with Iran/Contragate concerns the putting into place of a plan, under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (with the participation of Lt.-Col. North), that calls for the suspension of the Constitution, the imposition of martial law, and concentration camp round-ups, to be put into effect as a means of dealing with widespread domestic dissent arising out of a US invasion of Nicaragua. A similar martial law plan had been drawn up in California when Ronald Reagan was Governor. That plan called for putting African-Americans into concentration camps in the event of a Black rebellion. The FEMA plan is in essence the blueprint for a Fascist coup and one would think the hearing committee should have had some interest in it, especially since it claimed protection of the Constitution one of its overriding concerns. But when Congressman Stokes began questioning Oliver North on the subject, he was abruptly cut off, while the next day North was permitted to deny the existence of any such plan.

As the hearings drew to what was expected to be their climatic finale, the Committee veered away from nailing down what to most Americans was patently obvious: that Reagan and his Administration cronies were at the very center of the conspiracy and active participants in the cover-up. In one of North's few truthful moments he laid out the Administration plan: There was to be a "fall guy," someone higher than North. And indeed the scenario was played out and the buck was stopped at Poindexter, with the connivance of the committee Democrats, who permitted themselves just the suggestion of a raised eyebrow at the White House's preposterous version of events.

Above all, what the Committee concealed from the American people was the real horror and criminality of US foreign policy. And so, to the Administration cover-up was added the Congressional cover-up of the very essence of the Iran/Contragate scandal.

The hearings were concluded for the most part on a note of warm bipartisan fellowship, with at least a tacit bargain having been struck whereby Shultz and Weinberger, who were prepared to criticize some of the means, but not the ends of Iran/Contragate's im-

perial policy, were presented as models of virtuous public service in return for their clubbing North and Poindexter, and particularly in return for their disassociating themselves from North's and Poindexter's defiance of Congress.

The Administration and the Congress, through the Committee, had worked out a compromise, the first fruits of which are already evidenced in the stillborn Reagan/Jim Wright "peace plan" for Nicaragua, which was a failed attempt to torpedo the meeting of Central American presidents.

Let us, then, examine the political context of the Iran/Contragate events, which the investigating committee so carefully placed outside the scope of its inquiry.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The US Government, under the Reagan Doctrine, has been stepping up its war against the vast majority of the peoples of the world—a war employing a variety of weapons: the use of the IMF and other Western financial institutions as a vise on the jugular of developing countries; embargoes and other forms of economic warfare; covert actions of destabilization and subversion; aid to bloody despots; the brandishing of nuclear weapons; and what is most characteristic of this Administration, the instigation, financing and organization of proxy wars.

The nations of the Third World bear the brunt of these savage activities, which aim at forcing them into submission to the transnational corporations and into submission to a structure of US military hegemony.

All this did not begin with Reagan. As a matter of fact, US policy has been constant since World War II, through both Democratic and Republican Administrations, a policy sometimes employing the carrot, sometimes the stick, sometimes both at once, but always in the service of Big Business.

Illustrating this continuity is J. Peter Grace, whose corporate empire comprises vast holdings in Latin America. Congressman Henry Gonzalez points to Grace as the real architect of Reagan's genocidal Latin-American policy. But it was the same J. Peter Grace who fathered the "Alliance for Progress" of the Kennedy Administration, a program trumpeted at the time as a model of enlightened and generous good-neighborliness.

The Reagan Administration represents continuity. But it also brings something dangerously new to US policy. The doctrine of "low-intensity warfare" is being translated into a permanent condition

of Third World conflagration, permanent blood-letting, famine—the creation of a vast permanent wasteland. And the Star Wars project, if successfully implemented, might bring us to the point where the march to a nuclear holocaust would become irreversible.

What is also new about the Reagan presidency is that in the face of the growing popular resistance and growing opposition within the Establishment itself, covert operations have been transformed from an adjunct to the principal means of the conduct of foreign policy. And these covert actions are being increasingly conducted outside the framework of law and the Constitution, outside the oversight of even Establishment circles, so that we are being edged ever closer to the kind of Fascist dictatorship here at home that the government is promoting abroad.

GRAPHIC OPINION



Wright, The Miami News

THE BASEMENT OPERATION

Iran/Contragate was the offspring of a cabal, centered at the National Security Council in the White House basement, backed by the highest figures in the Administration, involving a network composed of a high proportion of military and intelligence officers—active and retired—flouting Congressional mandates and Constitutional provisions in order to promote insurgencies in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, and other independent and/or progressive Third World nations, to overthrow those governments and install pro-Western, “free-enterprise” regimes, or at least to so drain their economies as to frustrate their progress and keep them from serving as dangerous examples to their neighbors (dangerous from the transnational

corporation and Pentagon standpoint). This cabal was in the process of developing an apparatus, “free-standing and self-financed,” in the words of Oliver North, unaccountable to Congress or even subject to the normal chain of command within the Executive branch, which would gather to itself sufficient power to become no longer merely a “government-within-a-government” but *the* government itself.

How did this basement operation spring up? What does it represent? What are its underlying roots?

THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE ESTABLISHMENT

Since the advent of the Cold War, there has been a fierce and sustained struggle within the oligarchy of this country over the means by which to attain their common imperial objectives. And part of this struggle has centered around differences concerning the *perceived limits* of the exercise of US power.

There is an ultra-Right, convinced that the economic, and especially the military might of the United States has not been sufficiently mobilized nor brought to bear on behalf of US imperialism, that US policy has not been aggressive or daring enough. It is less committed to diplomacy and more to brute force. The alignment of forces between the ultra-Right and the heretofore dominant wing of the Establishment has not been static, nor has the terrain remained constant over which the two wings have fought. Since the “failure” from the Establishment point of view of the policy of limited détente in the 1970s, the ultra-Right has been gaining converts to its camp, while at the same time the entire Establishment has shifted to the right, uniting on many of the positions of the ultras.

The battles between the ultra-Right and other sectors of the Establishment are usually hidden, but occasionally surface in dramatic fashion. We might cite certain of the starker moments of these struggles: the Truman dismissal of General MacArthur; the Eisenhower-McCarthy struggle; the assassination of President Kennedy; the Goldwater/Rockefeller battle. One recalls the decade when “Eastern Liberal Establishment” replaced “Communist” as the reactionary pejorative of choice.

The victory of Ronald Reagan represented the ultra-Right’s greatest triumph, facilitated in part by the growing weight of the military-industrial complex in the US economy and the shifting demographic and economic weight in favor of the West and Sun Belt against a declining Northeast and Midwest. The unprecedented arms buildup, the linchpin of Reagan’s program, both reflected and

contributed to the continued ascendancy of the military-industrial complex. At the same time, the oligarchy as a whole had temporarily arrived at a virtual consensus, which explains the curiously ineffective campaign waged by Walter Mondale and the token Democratic opposition within Congress to the Reagan programs.

The conflict between the National Security Council and the Department of State, uncovered in the recent scandal, is not new to the Reagan Administration. Similar conflicts existed between the NSC head Kissinger and the more moderate Secretary of State Rogers in the Ford Administration, and between the hawk Brzezinski, head of the NSC under Carter and the then Secretary of State Vance. These inter-agency disputes express the larger conflict between the moderate and ultra-Right wings.

The Right came to power under Reagan against the background of an increasingly imperial presidency where foreign policy was subject to diminishing scrutiny by and accountability to Congress and the American people. The Reagan victory engendered a period of national euphoria as many white Americans saw in Reagan the man who would reassert the divine world mission of the Anglo-Saxon, after years of frustrating defeats or humiliating concessions both at home and abroad.

But it gradually became apparent that the Reagan program was both bankrupt and bankrupting. Popular opposition grew and the previous Establishment consensus broke down. The Right was then faced with the choice of abiding by the demands of public opinion and the wishes of powerful financial and corporate interests, defying these forces (something it was not yet strong enough to do), or trying to continue its program by stealth, subterfuge, misrepresentation, in secrecy. The result: Iran/contragate. When the Administration was found out, the Iran/Contragate hearings became the principle vehicle for a counterattack by the moderate wing of the Establishment.

We shall examine exactly how this struggle was conducted.

THE IRAN SIDE OF IRAN/CONTRAGATE

The revelation that the US had shipped arms to Iran, and further, that it was trying to trade arms for hostages, stunned the American people, for these deals undermined a supposed cornerstone of US foreign policy. The Reagan Administration had proclaimed itself world leader in the fight against terrorism. As a matter of fact, one of Reagan's chief campaign issues had been Jimmy Carter's handling of the hostage situation and his "soft" policy toward Iran. And it must

be admitted that not only Reagan's tough rhetoric but his bombing of Libya enjoyed wide public support.

The revelations, therefore, aroused shock and outrage among the US public, and a sense of betrayal, particularly among Reagan's base of conservative supporters.

What was behind Reagan's seeming 180-degree reversal of course, stubbornly persisted in despite the strong opposition of his two principal foreign policy advisers, Shultz and Weinberger.

The Administration version is that the Iranian initiative was conceived primarily as an "opening to the moderates," and that the release of hostages was viewed only as a "bonus." This opening was sought, the White House said, in preparation for the post-Khomeini regime, a regime that would see the wisdom of reestablishing US-Iranian relations on the basis of a shared anti-Sovietism.

Of course, it is true that the US *was* trying to reestablish an Iranian-US alliance, such as existed in the days of the shah, and tried to curry favor with the Iranian government by sending intelligence reports with the names of the Ayatollah's political opponents, as well as doctored photographs and false intelligence concerning the massing of Soviet troops on the Iranian border.

But the problem with the "opening to the moderates" explanation is that one obviously does not encourage a moderate, opposition faction by shipping the Iranian government arms when it is involved in a major war with Iraq on which it has staked its prestige.

Another interesting revelation in this regard was the use of that profiteer plenipotentiary Albert Hakim, who posed as a US government negotiator and signed an agreement with the "moderates" which guaranteed, among other things, that the US would assassinate the Iraqi president and work for the release of the "terrorists" held in Kuwaiti prisons. North testified that these were promises that the US never intended to carry out, but he left unanswered the questions of how a new relationship with "moderates" could be established based on lies and false promises.

The "opening to the moderates" explanation for US arms shipments to Iran was invented to cover the real aim, which was the release of the US hostages. We shall show later that while this was the goal, and in fact obsession in 1985 and 1986, US-sanctioned arms shipments to Iran had been going on for quite some time before that and had nothing to do with the hostage issue.

Reagan and his associates now admit that the arms deal did indeed "degenerate" into a pure arms-for-hostages trade. And every hearing witness, from North to Shultz, portrayed Reagan as having

fallen into this trap due to the President's humane nature, his compassionate concern for the hostages and their families. North and Poindexter likewise portrayed themselves as motivated by humane concern, justifying their deceptions and falsehoods as a tradeoff of "lies for lives."

One remembers, of course, that these same humanitarian gentlemen have the blood of tens of thousands on their hands, victims of US policy in Chile, Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Kampuchea, Libya, Grenada, Haiti, and on and on.

But perhaps that humanitarian concern is sincerely felt when it is a question of the lives of Americans?

We shall pass over the Administration's responsibility for the needless deaths of US servicemen in Lebanon, or the sailors of the *Stark*. We ask where Reagan's humanity resided when he refused to aid our atomic veterans or our veterans who fell victim to Agent Orange?

And where was Reagan's humanity when his Administration tried to cut off benefits from hundreds of thousands of the disabled, took away lunches from needy children, denied the existence of hunger and homelessness in our country, and is now trying to dismantle public housing, which would result in the creation of millions of additional homeless?

Did not this cry out to be said at those Congressional hearings? But no people's voice was to be found on the entire committee.

Then why Reagan's hostage concern? Very simple: *the 1986 elections*.

The story of the exploitation of the hostage issue to gain an election victory goes back to 1980. It begins with Reagan forces stealing Jimmy Carter's campaign book in an effort to find out if Carter had prepared an "October surprise," that is, whether Carter had made a deal with the Iranians to free the hostages in the American Embassy just prior to the presidential elections. To forestall such an eventuality, Reagan forces entered into secret negotiations with the Iranian government (according to Khomeini's first prime minister, as well as a former Iranian security chief), arranging for the delay of the release of those hostages until after the elections, in return for a promise of arms aid under the new Reagan Administration. The deal was consummated and the hostages were not released until the day of the Reagan inauguration. Arms were shipped via Israel shortly thereafter.

An interesting aspect of this intrigue concerns Carter's abortive rescue mission, which ended in ignominious self-destruction. This

operation was participated in, among others, by none other than Oliver North and General Secord, fueling speculation as to whether or not the rescue mission was sabotaged by Reagan's men. The failure of that effort played no inconsiderable role in Jimmy Carter's election defeat.

The importance attached to the 1986 elections by the Reagan forces was enormous, as witnessed by the unprecedented sums of money spent on the Republican candidacies and the strenuous barnstorming by Reagan on their behalf. What was at stake here was not the usual partisan concerns. It was a question of maintaining power to continue the ultra-Right agenda.

And so here is the answer to the question which so mystified the Congressional investigating committee: How could the President have overridden the strenuous objections of his two principal foreign policy officers and set in motion a chain of events that from the standpoint of US foreign policy objectives was as risky as it was stupid?

The reason that Shultz's and Weinberger's advice was ignored was that, not being part of Reagan's inner circle, they were not committed to that special ultra-Right agenda which demanded an election victory in '86 and whatever gamble was necessary to ensure it.

THE ISRAELI FACTOR

There is no doubt that Israel actively encouraged Washington in its overtures to Iran. But efforts by certain Republican circles to portray Israel as shrewdly manipulating a naive and goodhearted Uncle Sam are totally disingenuous. The Israeli tail is not wagging the US dog. Israeli shipments of arms, which have been substantial and continuous since 1981, could not have taken place without US approval. And the testimony at the hearing shows that the United States was quite aware of the Israeli shipments. The fact is that Israel is a totally bankrupt state which could not last 30 days without the huge and constant infusion of US aid. Nor could Israel survive a war with the Arab states without US military assistance. With regard to the Zionist lobby, which is sometimes credited with controlling US policy on the Mideast, the lobby is no doubt powerful, using its muscle primarily through the Democratic Party. But it has been having its way primarily because Zionist aims largely coincide with those of US imperialism and Israel has frequently played an enormously valuable surrogate role, especially in the Third World. The fact of the matter is that the monies raised by the Zionist lobby can be easily over-

matched, should the Establishment ever find it necessary to do so. But right now, despite the efforts of some circles to have the US pursue a more "even-handed" policy between Israel and the reactionary Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia, the dominant view is that Israel is the most reliable tool in promoting the interests of the US oligarchy in the Mideast.

What is of fundamental interest to both the Governments of Israel and the United States is the prolongation of the Iran-Iraq bloodbath, for this fratricidal war has prevented the peoples of the region from uniting and devoting their resources to the struggle against their real enemies in the region: American imperialism and Israeli expansionism. Behind all the talk of US "neutrality" in the Iran-Iraq war and about the desire to see neither side gain a military victory is the real policy of fostering an endless war, now assisting one side, now the other.

THE POLITICS OF OIL

In understanding US Mideast policy, including its Iran policy, one must bear in mind the politics of oil, which has always been the single most influential economic factor driving US foreign policy. One should remember that for many years oil has generated a full third of the profits of all US overseas investments. The US continues to keep its greedy eyes on the Mideast oil reserves, gradually wrested from it by the Arab countries and Iran, but which it clearly would like to regain.

Moreover, as we saw in 1973, a crisis in the Mideast drives up oil prices, resulting in fantastic profits. We see such a crisis in the making now in the Persian Gulf—and oil prices are climbing once again.

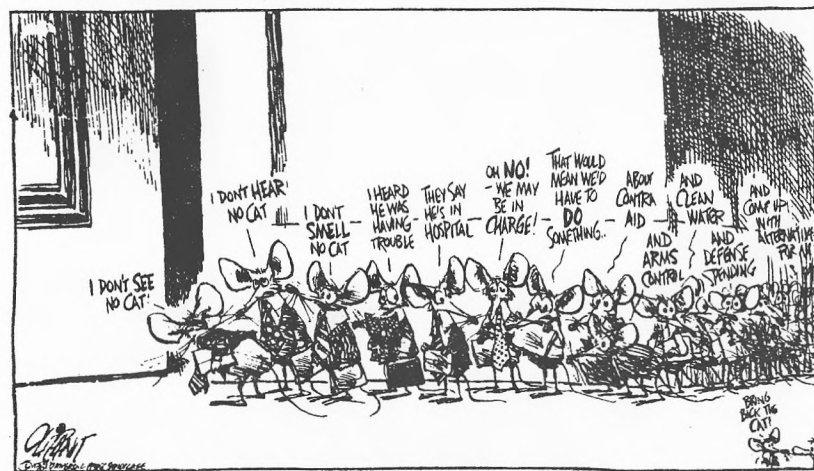
THE CONTRA SIDE OF IRAN/CONTRAGATE

Oliver North shed torrents of crocodile tears in front of the TV cameras on behalf of the "brave freedom-fighters" left in the lurch and betrayed by Congress.

It is instructive that of the sixteen or so million dollars generated by the Iranian arms sales and earmarked for the Contras, transactions entrusted to the patriotic businessmen General Secord and Albert Hakim, the Contras received only some three million. Eight million dollars currently resides in a Swiss bank account of Secord and Hakim—something that the hearings established was of little concern to Oliver North. Moreover, the arms that were provided to the Contras were sold to them at twice the market price. This

venture was to be but the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between North, the quartermaster, and Secord and Hakim, the contractors. Their mutual oyster was to be the Third World agony. And so one could understand the sudden rush of affection that prompted Hakim to make arrangements for a bequest to North's family to the tune of \$200,000, and one could understand as well the generosity behind the clearly illegal provision by General Secord of a \$16,000 security set-up at North's home.

North's cashing of Contra checks for his own personal use, his handling of vast amounts of money without keeping financial records—all this corruption manifested by "patriotic zealots" is endemic to our system. But at the same time it often interferes with the general aims of the Establishment. We see this with the contra scam, with the space shuttle disaster, with the whole corrupt system of war contracts that crank out defective weapons at inflated costs.



THE DEMOCRAT-CONTROLLED CONGRESS RETURNS...

THE CONDUCT OF THE HEARINGS: THREE CONGRESSIONAL GROUPINGS

The hearing committee members can be placed into three political categories: The Democrats, the moderate Republicans, and the ultra-Right Republicans. Each group had its own political aims and

conducted themselves in the hearings consistent with those aims.

One should note at the outset that it was the Democrats as the majority party in both Houses of Congress who organized the hearings, and it was the way in which the hearings were organized that largely predetermined the political results that emerged.

One striking aspect of that organization was that the Democrats selected to serve on the Committee were far more conservative than the Democratic membership of the House and Senate bodies as a whole. Thus, while a large majority of Democrats in both houses had voted *against* Contra aid, a majority of the Democratic Committee members were Contra *supporters*, as they frequently pointed out during the course of the hearings.

The Democrats confined the investigation's mandate to the events post-1985, bearing only on the Iranian arms sale and contra fund diversion. We have already alluded to the areas into which the Committee refused to delve.

The Democratic strategy was to focus on the illegal, unconstitutional and profiteering aspects of Iran/Contragate and to refuse to challenge the major premises of the Administration's Central-American and Mideast policies. This strategy resulted in the hearings becoming a platform for Right-wing views, with witness after witness championing the "freedom-fighters," sounding the alarm on a "Russian base in our back yard," and condemning the supposed lack of freedom in Nicaragua—themes that were echoed ad nauseam by the Right-wing committee members. Not once did the Democrats offer a differing view.

The climax of the Right-wing offensive came with the testimony of Oliver North, whose combative and unapologetic self-defense and Gary Cooper image set of a wave of "Ollimania" (undoubtedly to a large extent orchestrated) that turned the tables on the investigating committee, constraining the Democrats to assure everyone of their own patriotic credentials, of their own anti-Communism, and in some cases of their own Contra support.

It is clear that one aim of the Democrats was to wound the Reagan Administration—enough to win the next election—but not to kill it, nor to do anything that would set impeachment proceedings in motion, for a full exposure of the Reagan Administration's crimes is not in the interests of Corporate America.

The other aim of the Democrats was to throw a piercing, if narrow light on Right-wing excesses within the Administration in order to curb Administration usurpations. The Democrats are growing nervous about the methods of the ultra-Right and about the potentially catastrophic consequences of ultra-Right adventurism.

The moderate Republicans on the committee (Rudman and Cohen, for example), were as strong as the Democrats in condemning North's and Poindexter's *modus operandi*, and were also willing to snipe at the Reagan Administration's ineptness. Where the Democrats and the moderate Republicans parted company was on the question of the culpability of Reagan and his top aides in setting Iran/Contragate in motion and then in the cover-up. While the Democrats left that question open, the moderate Republicans completely exonerated Reagan and his cabinet. It is clear that the moderate Republicans were motivated by two considerations: One, they too are alarmed by the recklessness of the Right wing and consider the Right now to present a peril to the general interests of the Establishment. At the same time, while wishing to distance themselves from the most indefensible aspects of the Iran/Contragate affair (as seen by their constituents), their own re-election prospects require that Reagan and his Administration be protected.

The Right-wing Republicans (Hyde and Hatch, for example) used every opportunity to shield not only the Reagan Administration, but North and Poindexter in particular, portraying them as heroes who were simply overzealous in pursuing their lofty objectives and who were provoked into taking matters into their own hands by Congressional flip-flopping on the Contra issue, Congressional leaks, etc. The Right-wing Republicans insisted no laws had been broken and tried to turn the hearings into an attack on Congressional "liberals."

All three groups were unanimous in commending the aims and the motives of the participants in Iran/Contragate. The Democrats and moderate Republicans quarreled only with the means used.

The Right, through North, Poindexter and the Right-wing Committee members, rang the changes on a number of Fascist themes that are worth noting. One of the favorite Right-wing targets of the past has been the judiciary, but since Reagan has filled half the Federal bench with his own appointees and changed the complexion of the Supreme Court, the focus of attack has now turned the Congress and the "meddling" by "535 Secretaries of State" into the prerogatives of the Executive. Nowhere was this defiance of Congress more manifest than in the claim by Poindexter and North that they could conduct any operations they saw fit, accountable only to the President, while their counsel adopted a theatrically contemptuous pose before the hearing committee. The demand for a free hand for the President paves the way, of course, for the eventual installation of the dictator.

Another Right-wing theme is the appeal to paranoia. "We live in a dangerous world," North and Poindexter repeatedly observed. (The Russians are coming!) Of course, an atmosphere of hysteria is an important precondition for establishment of a regime of repression.

And then there is the classical "stab in the back" theme. "We didn't lose the war in Vietnam, we lost it in Washington," said North. (Shades of Hitler's theme of "betrayal" at Versailles and the similar claim of betrayal by the French ultras after the Algerian war.)

The ultra-Right have the resources to call into being a huge mass movement whenever they wish, grounded in the virulent racism of US society and fueled by growing frustrations in a deteriorating economy. So far, this course has been deemed inexpedient. The Right for the moment prefers to work through the "respectable" instrument of the Republican Party. But it should not be surprising if the Right adopts a new strategy at the next serious economic downturn.

SOME POLITICAL CONCLUSIONS

It is of course too early to forecast the full political impact of the Iran/Contragate affair. There is still the matter of the criminal indictments to come, and undoubtedly new revelations will emerge out of the Office of the Independent Counsel.

But certain conclusions would appear to be warranted even at this point.

The Right wing was able to energize a section of the American people—particularly as a result of the performance of Oliver North, and are attempting to capitalize on that energy. Public opinion polls, which always need to be taken with a grain of salt, indicate the hearings have helped shift public sentiment toward the Contras, and for this the Democrats must be held fully responsible.

It is nevertheless remarkable that notwithstanding the barrage of unchallenged pro-Contra, anti-Sandinista propaganda in month after month of public hearings, the shift in public opinion has been quite modest and would appear to be transitory, reflecting the stubborn distaste for the Contra gang that still characterizes the attitude of the majority of the American people. More important, undoubtedly, is the widespread and deeply felt fear that continued support for the Contras will drag us into intervention by US troops. The "Vietnam syndrome" is still very much alive.

The behavior of the Democrats in the hearings is typical of the equivocal role played by the Party throughout the Reagan years in projecting a half-hearted and often pseudo-opposition to the

Administration's aggressive and extremely dangerous policies—an opposition that is more often than not a concession to the pressure of public opinion rather than expressing any sincere conviction of its own. It suggests that they are maneuvering to work out a compromise with the Administration which the White House is giving the *appearance* of accepting, changing personnel, giving various assurances to Congress, and pledging to adopt new procedures. And now the Right is beginning to turn on Reagan himself.

But the fact that the White House basement apparatus could have been created in spite of all the Congressional "reforms" instituted after the Watergate affair and designed to prevent just such things as occurred in Iran/Contragate proves conclusively, if proof were still needed, that *only a powerful, organized popular movement can really stand in the way of the Fascist menace*. An important lesson is that *it would be disastrous to rely on the moderates within the Establishment to preserve democratic rights or to prevent this country from plunging the world into a nuclear holocaust, although differences within the Establishment should be fully exploited*. And this applies to the Liberals as well, bearing in mind how quickly they fell into line at the beginning of the Cold War, their craven conduct in the era of McCarthyism, their early support of the Vietnam War, their treacherous conduct in the Civil Rights movement. The truth is that the moderates and Cold War liberals operate with the same fundamental premises as the ultra-Right and have helped to create the political climate of the Cold War, of racism and jingoism, of the ideology of Big Business, which the ultra-Right has exploited and with which it has gained power.

The relentless attack on the Constitution by the Reagan Administration and the ultra-Right challenges progressives to define their own attitude to that document. Need we concern ourselves with something that in its creation countenanced slavery and ensured the protection of the propertied, and has never prevented gross infringements on the rights of the people—African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, women, working people generally, and political dissenters? Should we be concerned about a document that fails to address the most basic economic and social needs of our people? We believe the answer is yes, for the Constitution memorializes, as well, tremendous popular struggles, in the early days to ensure that popular rights were formally recognized, and ever since to realize in practice those formal guarantees.

Is it not becoming increasingly clear that the Constitution, with all its limitations, and even though honored more in the breach, is

being assaulted by the ultra-Right and the powerful financial and corporate forces that stand behind it precisely because they find the Constitution increasingly an *obstacle* to their violent and rapacious schemes, find it increasingly vital to their agenda to destroy one after another the rights of the people proclaimed in the Constitution? Is it not becoming increasingly clear—and nowhere more starkly than in the Iran/Contragate affair—that implementing the program of imposing Facism on the Third World requires bringing that same program back home?

Of course, no piece of paper, no Constitution, even one infinitely more democratic than ours, can guarantee democracy or by itself bar the way to Fascism. But history shows that the Constitution is extremely important, not as a substitute for but as a tool of mass struggle. Hence, we must not only work to protect the Constitution but to significantly expand its scope.

But the struggle against Fascism cannot be confined to the question of the preservation of civil liberties. While a useful component of the struggle, by itself it will not be decisive. Fascism can only be defeated by an all-out struggle against racism and sexism. It can only be defeated if a powerful mass movement is built around the pressing needs of the great masses of people, around jobs, housing, education, health. And it can only be defeated if these struggles become imbued with a high political consciousness which incorporates the issue of peace and recognizes our community of interest with working peoples around the world.

The struggle against Fascism also requires a new political vehicle. The behavior of the Democratic Party in the Iran/Contragate affair expresses both the reality of the struggle within the Establishment as well as its limitations. As an instrument of Big Business, along with the Republican Party, it cannot lead the struggle to defend democracy, to end the Cold War, to eliminate poverty, to eradicate racism and sexism as well as their vicious legacies, or to work toward a new society based on human need rather than profit-making of a handful of parasitical banks and transnational corporations.

The Democratic Party belongs to an obsolete, irrational and barbarous system. A new, truly democratic, truly people's party must be placed on top of the agenda of all progressives. It may be premature to launch it now, but we must begin laying its foundation *at once!*

IRAN

CONTRAGATE

*What the Hearings Revealed
What the Hearings Wouldn't Touch*

Joseph Kaye