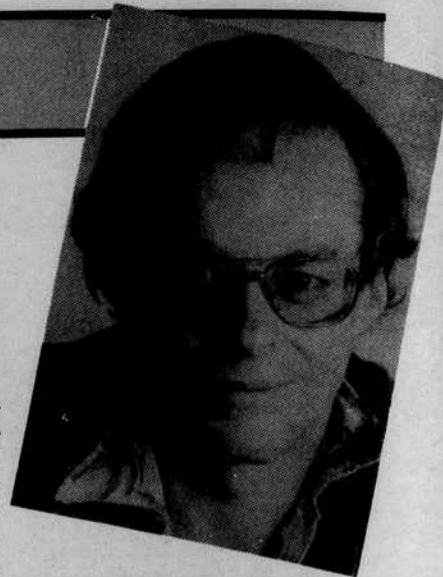


ASHES and DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn



Rocky Horror Show

It is hard to repress a shudder while turning on the television set to watch the Iran/contra hearings in Washington, D.C. True to gloomy predictions Republicans, with the slack-jawed acquiescence and even vociferous support of most Democrats, have turned the joint Congressional investigation into a pro-contra rally. Even senators and representatives with good intentions dribble away opportunity, baying emptily down false trails, bombarding the witnesses with red herrings. It's instructive to remember the Senate and House probes of the Watergate scandals and the performance of the congressional class of '73 and '74. The difference is as good an index as any of the political rot of the past decade and a half.

As I suggested here a month ago, Israel has disappeared from the scandal entirely, at least so far as these Congressional hearings are concerned. Under the zealous protection of Senator Inouye, the nation that either co-sponsored or initiated the arms and money shuttle to Iran and on to Nicaragua, is referred to only by number. It took Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh, with the issue of his subpoena for David Kimche, Israeli arms dealer and former head of the Foreign Ministry, to remind the world that Israel was involved. Israel had exacted from Sen. Inouye promises that whatever documents it might turn over would not be disclosed without consultation.

Indeed Israel, despite its domestic

political crisis, has felt sufficiently relaxed about its scandal-management to dispatch—according to a report in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in February—military instructors to work with the Iranian revolutionary guards, the Pasadaran. The magazine said that the wisdom imparted by these instructors contributed to the success, earlier this year, of the Pasadaran on the southern front against Iraq. Israel has also been reported as supplying trainers for the contras in Honduras.

Congressional timidity about causing offense to Israel has been a prime factor in prompting the debacle of the hearings, since it was outrage at the furnishing of weapons to Khomeini rather than at illegal U.S. supply of the contras that made the U.S. congressional watchdogs—and press—stir sleepily in their kennels. But since resolute probing of what happened between the U.S. and Iran must inevitably involve Israel, the committee has swivelled its attention to Nicaragua, thus allowing Courtier, Garn and the others their contra soap box.

All is not utterly dark. Despite the incantatory howls in the corporate press about Reagan's supposed popularity, the late-May CBS/New York Times poll, among others, appears to have established beyond reasonable doubt that more Americans than otherwise think he is doing a lousy job and three out of four think he is lying about his role in the scandal. This is well above the Nixon level on the

spectrum of human credibility. So cheer up. And while we are at it, listen to a true tribune of the people addressing the House of Representatives on May 4, 1987:

"So here we are with a President trying to divert our attention by trying to say he can do something with literally a bunch of gangsters known as the Contras. . . . How in the world would they be received in Nicaragua if we were to try to pour them down

under the yoke of the worst kind of tyrant, the most corrupt form of human government in any part of the world. And who gave a hoot then about human rights? Where was Ronald Reagan worrying about human rights and freedom and democracy in Nicaragua? . . . Either we get on the side of the people or we continue as the aides and the allies and those in close brotherhood with the despots and tyrants of this part of the world." This was Rep. Henry Gonzalez of Texas, the lone person in Congress calling for the impeachment of Ronald Reagan.

Contra Love Call

Six days after Gonzalez expressed these uplifting sentiments, Sandinista troops wiped out a contra base near San Andres de Bocay and drove more than 800 contras across the river into Honduras. This was the terrain to which credulous U.S. journalists had been brought in droves to examine the supposed ability of the contras to hold a piece of Nicaraguan soil. Their plan, conceivably in conjunction with the U.S. "Solid Shield" maneuvers just above the Honduran border, was to have FDN military commander Enrique Bermudez and other contra leaders come down and claim that the "democratic resistance" now functions inside Nicaragua. Had the Sandinistas not successfully routed the contras it is entirely conceivable that Bermudez and the others would have made their descent to "liberated territory" in mid-May and immediately

called upon the U.S. troops massed a few miles to the north to come and help them ward off Sandinista attack. This has been a Reagan scenario all along, hand in hand with other strategy, chillingly evoked in late May by General Galvin to *Boston Globe* reporter Fred Kaplan, with his remark that the contras were doing well since they were hitting "soft targets" and "not duking it up with the Sandinistas." By "soft targets" Galvin meant peasant co-ops, health workers, medical facilities, ill-defended settlements, and other targets appropriate to the martial arts of the contras.

On May 14 the Sandinistas flew up 70 reporters to examine the abandoned contra camp, but precious little of their findings made it into the U.S. corporate media. In a typical dispatch Steven Kinzer of the *New York Times*, who followed his usual habit of staying in Managua and seeking the counsel of "diplomatic sources," i.e., the U.S. embassy, acknowledged that there may have been a battle in which the contras were routed, but on the other hand there may not and that perhaps the contras never claimed to control this area and on the other hand perhaps they did and who knows the narrow line that divides truth from fiction, etc., etc. *The Militant*, the

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