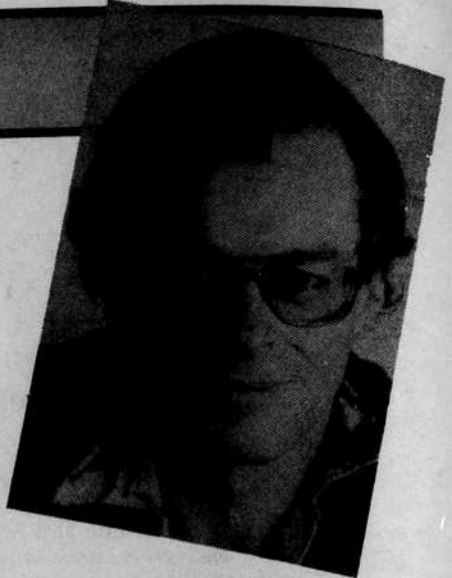


ASHES and DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn



Follow the Money

Half choking amid the toxic fog caused by smoking guns introduced into the Iran/contra hearings, Rep. Les Aspin of Wisconsin advanced cautiously along the trail of truth on July 21, as Admiral Poindexter faced the increasingly incredulous committee.

"I have come to the conclusion," said Aspin, "that we're missing something—that there's got to be another source of funding for the contras." He then said he had made a spreadsheet of known funds going to the contras from congressionally approved sources, appropriated money, countries such as Saudi Arabia, private donations and the "diversions" or "residuals." The results, Aspin said, "are very interesting" since they show a big gap in funding. Whereas the contras had been getting by on \$3.4 million a month until February, 1986, "then for the next eight months the money drops off precipitously and from all sources . . . you're talking about . . . less than \$3 million from all sources . . . for a total of an eight month period."

Two obvious sources come to mind and to put the question on one of them Aspin would have had only to turn in his chair and address one of the committee's senior investigative staffers, Tom Polgar. Polgar would have told him smoothly that according to the committee's investigation the CIA had most definitely not been giving secret funds to the contras. But then that is what Polgar would have been likely to say, since Polgar was a career officer in the CIA, most notably in Saigon during the Vietnam war. The hiring of Polgar—pressed by Senator Warren Rudman—made it plain from the start that the Iran/contra committee was going to be circumspect and ever mindful of the paramount importance of not looking more than a few inches beyond the end of its own nose.

Even so, Aspin could have then headed down the corridor to the two separate Congressional hearings into allegations of contra drug smuggling. Here he could find an answer to this interesting question of how the con-

tra leadership kept going, either in the field or in their other main sphere of operations—the real estate market in southern Florida.

The latest New York Times/CBS poll showed that contra aid is still opposed by 51 percent of all Americans, down somewhat from the days before the hearings became a contra-aid telethon. But as the Ollie craze subsides, an increasingly high profile to the drug/contra connection could erode the chances of the next contra military aid package going through congress in the fall. The way things are at the moment, enough Democrats will vote for it unless given an unimpeachable reason not to. Killing Nicaraguan civilians is not regarded as sufficient cause for these swing Democrats to withhold funds.

Putsch Plans

The disclosure that Colonel Oliver North worked with the Federal Emergency Planning Administration on a secret executive order to suspend the constitution and run the country under martial law was received with considerable shock as evidence of a putschist mentality new in American history. The thing to remember is that the governing elites always tend to look on the dark side and to fear that the authority of the state rests on sand.

Among the emergencies against which North and FEMA urged martial law was domestic protest over a U.S. invasion of a foreign country, i.e. Nicaragua. Back at the time of the Vietnam war there were undoubtedly similar contingency plans. In 1967 Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was already gloomily warning of immense domestic unrest and the need to make major provision against it. Then, after the Tet offensive, the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the dispatch of 200,000 extra troops to Vietnam, arguing that they would be needed in the U.S. to quell insurgency on the home front and maintain law and order. The fact that these troops were withheld from Vietnam is one of the great achievements of the antiwar movement.

Drug Test at ABC

On July 9 Capital Cities/ABC alerted all its employees in a memorandum from the company's top executives,

Tom Murphy and Dan Burke, that as from late August of this year all final candidates for full-time employment would be asked to pass a drug test. Anyone failing the test would be considered unsuitable for employment for six months thereafter.

A three-page addendum addressed itself to some obvious questions. The test will screen for marijuana, cocaine, opiates such as heroin and codeine, benzodiazepines such as valium and librium, barbiturates, PCP, amphetamines and quaaludes. The testing process will be two-stage, with a positive first result confirmed by the gas chromatography/mass spectrometry process. Murphy and Burke note carefully that "nearly 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have instituted pre-employment testing," and say that in the case of Capitol Cities/ABC "the subject of drug abuse has been important to us as a company and we have had an anti-drug policy in effect since 1984 . . . in response to several unfortunate incidents involving drug use on company property. . . . We have intensified our education and rehabilitation program for existing employees [who will—as yet—not have to submit to the testing program, A.C.] . . . Nevertheless we know we are often not reaching everyone who needs help because the denial factor is so strong with drug abusers.

"This fact is made more apparent by the results obtained by another media company that began pre-employment testing over a year ago. Though their policy was known and understood by all applications, 17 percent failed the drug screen. Our testing process will help us by not hiring additional drug users while we're trying to aid current employees who need help."

As someone at one of the Capitol Cities/ABC subsidiaries remarked to me, "This all seems an invasion of privacy. How would such a test help workers currently employed here? By screening out people who smoked marijuana at a party days before their job interview, or people who took valium from a friend to calm down at an exceptionally stressful time? How about high-salaried executives here who can best afford certain controlled substances like cocaine? What about

the greatest hypocrisy of all—the abuse of alcohol and cigarettes which is a far greater threat to the health of much larger percentages of Cap Cities/ABC workers than any of the substances mentioned in this memo?"

Another thing the testing program won't help is the fanatical addiction of Cap Cities/ABC owners and executives to the drug called "money." Features of "money addiction" include the irresistible urge to shovel shit on a nightly basis into the face of the American viewer in order to increase advertising revenue and thus earn more profits which can then justify increasing the already vast salaries of the senior executives. The Shoopley-Hartheim "money addict profile" includes hyperventilation on a seasonal basis around the time of the quarterly earnings report, progressive dilatation of the cerebral shame suppressors, absence of all emotions of taste, humanity, compassion. Professor Shoopley notes that "money addiction is a marked feature of late capitalism, in which the act of accumulation subsumes all other indices of achievement."

Madman

In the old days newspaper tycoons were a ghastly lot, but at least more colorful in their eccentricities than the present gang, who spend half their time talking to stock analysts on Wall Street and the other half answering letters from Phyllis Schafly and Reed Irvine. It's a measure of how dull things have gotten that probably the most colorful major newspaper executive is the unalluring Allen Neuharth, chairman of the Gannett chain and, with an annual salary of about \$1.3 million, a confirmed money addict.

The Gannett chain is mostly made up of small boring papers—about 90—in monopoly situations, specializing in the "local news" that is Neuharth's recipe for keeping advertisers happy and readers undisturbed by intimations of the dangerous world that lies beyond the county line. To cap a career dedicated to mediocrity Neuharth founded *USA Today*, hurling money at the project in a desperate attempt to keep it afloat since its launch in 1982. *USA Today* is now supposedly on sound footing and Neuharth spends some of his time

trundling around the country in a sumptuously appointed bus, keeping his finger on the American pulse.

When it looked as though *USA Today* might fail, Neuharth summoned top managers to his home, called "The Pumpkin Center" in Cocoa Beach, Florida. He told them costs had to be cut and advertising and circulation improved if the paper was going to make it. After this urgent homily Neuharth invited the executives to join him in a "Last Supper." The dining room table was laid out with Manischewitz wine and unleavened bread and Neuharth stepped from behind a curtain wearing a crown of thorns. He stood in front of a wooden cross and intoned, "I am the crucified one." Then he told the gape-mouthed audience that they would all be "passed over" if *USA Today* failed. For further details about Neuharth and *USA Today* consult *The Making of McPaper* by Peter Prichard.

She Said It

"Nazis like Klaus Barbie and Adolf Eichmann claimed that not only were they obeying orders from the government, but that their obligation to obedience had no limits. Their prosecutors—at Nuremberg, in Jerusalem, in Lyons and wherever the Nazis were tried for such crimes—argue that there are some things no government has the right to require and some things every citizen has the obligation to refuse: the cold-blooded murder of civilians, the elimination of inferior races. Such acts cannot be excused or justified—not during wartime or by oaths of obedience. A citizen is neither obliged nor permitted to commit "crimes against humanity."

This was Jeane Kirkpatrick in her syndicated column. She should read it to Oliver North, who said he would stand on his head if ordered to do so by his commander in chief, and who planned and paid for the cold-blooded murder of civilians.

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