

# ASHES and DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn



## Unfairness Doctrine

The unanimous decision of the Federal Communications Commission to overturn the Fairness Doctrine after 38 years will have a major impact on public discussion in this country. The doctrine required television and radio stations to give contrasting viewpoints on issues of public importance and the requirement has been a mainstay of dissident political opinion in the United States.

As all viewers know well, network newscasts have been compelled to air, for three hours prime time each week, controversial and heterodox views about such matters as—in recent weeks—contra aid, the true story unfolding in the Iran-contra hearings, consumer information, radical political analysis of the operations of the major banks and the federal reserve system, political developments in the 99.9 percent of the world regularly misrepresented on the networks, and “public” (i.e., corporate) television.

All this has now been swept away and the airwaves, originally public property, will increasingly be the preserve of money-addicted corporations bent on increasing advertising revenues and diminishing energetic and democratic discussion of issues of major importance. Television and radio will never be the same again.

## Business As Usual

The Iran-contra hearings have trickled into the sand—a tragi-comic opera of missed opportunities, misapplied priorities, muffled questions and chicken hearted congress persons. On May 23 Randolph Ryan, one of the best mainstream editorial writers in the country, wrote in the *Boston Globe* that the hearings were not doing their job and that “the question to spend time on is not whether Ollie North paid for his snow tires, nor

whether Secord was a patriot, nor even ‘what President Reagan knew.’ It is how an elaborate world-wide special-operations system was constructed in the years after 1979, and what it consists of today, not just how it applies to Nicaragua but around the world. If that system is not targeted, it will never be uprooted. North may do six months for lingerie and snow-tire purchases, but the clandestine threat to democracy will remain.”

The only thing Ryan was wrong about—at least so far—was Ollie doing time.

Just consider that since the Iran-contra scandal broke and the hearings began, the U.S. government has almost beyond a doubt sponsored a coup in Fiji (see JoAnn Wypijewski’s marshalling of the evidence in the August 9-16 issue of *The Nation*; promoted the organization of death squads in the Philippines; continued supply of Savimbi’s UNITA in Angola and stepped up arming and supply of the Nicaraguan contras.

This is a list composed after only a brief moment’s reflection. More assiduous citation would have to include cooperation with South Africa in the supply of the Renamo movement in Mozambique, lately responsible for one of the most ghastly massacres in recent African history with its slaughter of more than 250 Mozambicans, many of them women and children.

In other words, it has been business as usual for secret government even while the hearings were going on.

## Hang Them High

*TV Guide’s* two-part series on public television has thus far produced some striking statistics: In fiscal 1983 the British government spent \$18 per capita on public broadcasting; Japan, \$10; Canada, \$22. In 1985 per capita

federal spending in the U.S. on public broadcasting was 57 cents. As *TV Guide’s* John Weisman crisply demonstrated, public television has degenerated into a gigantic and self-serving bureaucracy. Of the \$173 million the Corporation for Public Broadcasting got from all sources in 1985, only \$29 million went directly into programming; the average PBS station spends only three to six percent of its budget buying programs from PBS’s Station Program Cooperative.

## With Friends Like These

A retired colonel from the U.S. Marine Corps prepares a report labelled OPLAN arguing that the contras cannot win but that a full scale U.S. invasion with a force of 50,000 would gain effective control of Nicaragua within a month with the loss of about 600 men and 4,000 wounded. He notes that “even though U.S. forces will endeavor to minimize civilian casualties,” death of Nicaraguan civilians will be very high, along with 5,350 military casualties.

Who is this retired marine? Not, as you might imagine, some associate of Oliver North, working under contract to the National Security Council, but Lt. Col. John H. Buchanan, a member of the research staff of the Center for Defense Information. Now the CDI, 15 years old and headed by Rear Admiral Gene La Rocque, is a well known component of the “Public Interest” community in Washington. It is underwritten by Stuart Mott and has become respected for its factually-grounded analyses of the military balance, of arms reduction proposals, of U.S. weapons systems and kindred effusions of the war economy. Its regular reports, put out in the *Defense Monitor*, are to be seen on many a dovish desk and are usually sensible

and well documented.

The issue of the *Defense Monitor* devoted to “U.S. Invasion of Nicaragua” and prepared under Buchanan’s supervision, exhibits with pitiless accuracy the limitations both of the military mind (at least as possessed by USMC officers) and of public-interest liberalism, since no one at CDI saw fit to question the amazing document going forth under its imprimatur. Quite aside from the military assumptions of the scenario which exhibit a confidence in easy victory for the invading forces that might embarrass even Lt. Col. Oliver North, the political assumptions are grotesque.

For example, the report suggests that following the initial month-long blitzkrieg, there would be “small-scale resistance and low-level sabotage” for three months, during which time “there is a strong possibility that the U.S. Commander could find the Contras running amuck in operations against civilians. In such an event he would have to take time out from the war to forcibly sideline them.” A person who believes this will believe anything.

Then again the report suggests that in the next phase—lasting two years—“the United States will establish and try to legitimize a Nicaraguan government more to its liking. The first step will be to get rid of those ruthless military and political leaders in the contra ranks who would restore Nicaragua to the Somoza days. Hopes of any democratic process will soon be dashed if they remain.” The report points a lyrical picture of Nicaraguan reconstruction lubricated by U.S. dollars. “Many Nicaraguans will experience real prosperity for the first time in their lives.” Ironically, the U.S. will end up paying for everything the contras are now destroying as we finally provide the economic re-

sources desperately needed to produce a stable nation. If we must ultimately buy Nicaragua, would it not be wise to do it at much less cost now instead of after a brutal war?

Colonel Buchanan’s final conclusion? “The U.S. should employ its substantial political influence and economic power to promote constructive change in Nicaragua and Central America rather than resorting to war.”

With friends like these. . . . The folks at the Center for Defense Information should boot out Buchanan and learn to conduct arguments against intervention in a principled fashion. Let them study some anti-imperialist rhetoric from the turn of the century. Here’s what the Republican Senator George F. Hoar said in the U.S. Senate on the occasion of the annexation of Hawaii in 1898:

“If this be the first step in the acquisition of dominion over barbarous archipelagos in distant seas; if we are to enter into competition with the great powers of Europe in the plundering of China, in the division of Africa; if we are to quit our own to stand on foreign lands; if our commerce is hereafter to be forced upon unwilling peoples at the cannon’s mouth; if we are ourselves to be governed in part by peoples to whom the Declaration of Independence is a stranger; or, worse still, if we are to govern subjects and vassal states, trampling as we do it on our own great Charter which recognizes alike the liberty and the dignity of individual manhood, then let us resist this thing in the beginning, and let us resist it to the death.”

Try to imagine if you will Senator Joseph Biden or Senator Paul Simon or Governor Mike Dukakis or any candidate for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party saying these words. Jesse Jackson, yes; the rest, no way.

## Coming UP: Three-Week Issue

The August 27 issue of *What’s Happening* will be a three-week issue and will include events information from August 27-September 16.

## Office Hours, Deadlines

The August 27 issue is our annual summer-break issue and we will close the *What’s Happening* office from Friday, August 28 to Wednesday, September 9.

The office will re-open Thursday, September 10 at 9 am, and the Calendar and Classifieds deadline for the September 17 issue is 4 pm, September 10.

The display advertising deadline for the September 17 issue is Monday, September 14 at noon.

## Future Features

**September 17:** *Pacifica*, *What’s Happening’s* first Literary Supplement, is four pages of prose and poetry chosen by jurors of the First Annual Lane Literary Awards, sponsored by Lane Literary Guild, Lane Regional Arts Council and *What’s Happening*.

**September 25:** Eugene Celebration issue—comprehensive coverage of Eugene’s biggest party!

**Mid-October:** Special Fifth Anniversary Issue. *What’s Happening* looks back and looks ahead: How have we contributed to the specialness of Eugene? What is our future role?




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