

'Tells the Facts and Names the Names' CounterPunch

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Big Labor's Goon Squads Will AFL-CIO's New Chief Cut Them Off?

For over a generation the overseas arm of the AFL-CIO has been the accomplice of business and the enemy of effective unions around the world. This has been disastrous for foreign and American workers, since low-wage labor abroad encouraged U.S. companies to move overseas.

There will be one quick test of whether the new top man in the American labor movement intends a real shake up. These days unions must organize across borders, matching their corporate opponents. If they fail at this task they are nothing.

In Latin America, the American Institute for Free Labor Development, the AFL-CIO's subsidiary in the region, has been the ally of transnational corporations and of death squad repression of union organizers. The Institute — generally known as AIFLD (aye-feld) — has recently launched a PR blitz (with token bureaucratic reorganization to come) designed to portray itself as no longer a CIA adjunct but as a true friend of Latin American workers. However, its long-term chief, William Doherty, is still using AIFLD to undermine militant unions in the region, most notably in Mexico and Haiti, perpetuating the \$4 a day labor that is the cornerstone of the "free trade" system protected by NAFTA and GATT.

On October 26, delegates at the AFL-CIO convention in New York will select a new president. The contest is between John Sweeney, head of the Service Employees International Union, and Thomas Donahue, candidate of the old guard. As No. 2 to Lane Kirkland, the outgoing president, Donahue has been complicit with the globo-cop role played by the AFL-CIO's International Department. Little or nothing can be expected from him.

Sweeney has offered himself as the candidate of change. But if he truly plans to clean up the AFL-CIO's international operations he will have to lay siege to a cold war fortress controlled by tenacious veterans of the national security system. What the Green Berets were to peasant counter-insurgency, AIFLD and its Asian and African equivalents (the Asian-American Free Labor Institute and the African-American Labor Center, respectively) have been to any labor organizing across the world that the US deems contrary to the "national interest".

In preparing this article we spoke with more than a dozen labor officials and activists. But such is the fear of AIFLD that only Chris Townsend, political action director of the United Electrical Workers — a union not affiliated with the AFL-CIO — agreed to speak to us on the record. He put the case bluntly: "You can't reform fascism. AIFLD needs to be exposed and defunded, its staff should be fired and its records turned over to investigators."

Since 1962, when it was founded in response to "the threat of Castroite infiltration and eventual control of major labor movements", AIFLD money has helped finance military takeovers in Latin America, such as the 1964 coup in Brazil and Gen. Augusto Pinochet's 1973 seizure of power in Chile. During the 1980s, AIFLD supported the Salvadoran government's unleashing of death squads on leftist trade unionists, claiming that labor activists were communist dupes.

Traditionally, some 90 percent of AIFLD's funding has come from government bodies such as the US Agency for

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Colin Powell as Virtual Reality

The fascination with Colin Powell surely stems at least in part from the reassurance he offers to white America that the system is fair and that his life contains a greater truth about America than the fact that one out of every three young black men in this country is currently under some form of custodial supervision. He is a one-man cosmetic solution to the race problem.

In his autobiography, *A Soldier's Way*, Powell rises smoothly from poor beginnings in the Bronx to the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs. The memoir written by America's top soldier with the help of Joseph Persico, once a leading scribbler for Nelson Rockefeller, manages the extraordinary feat of filling 643 pages without giving the reader any sense of an interesting individual.

The real Powell must be a tougher and more artful, not to say cunning, customer than the soggy prose — half résumé, half sermon — discloses. The real Powell learned the crafts of political survival from some of the roughest customers in

Washington. As a White House Fellow at the time of Watergate he absorbed the rudiments of bureaucratic butchery from Fred Malek, a Nixon hit man riding herd on the federal bureaucracy. He honed these skills under the expert tutelage of Frank Carlucci and Richard Armitage, both notoriously hard players at the Pentagon.

Mythic Powell emerges with honor and reputation unblemished from the attempted cover-up of the massacre at My Lai, from the Iran-contra arms scandal and from intimate and prolonged association at the highest levels of the Reagan-Bush administrations in their piratical and frequently illegal enterprises. The narrative carefully notes that its hero joined the Americal Division in Vietnam *after* the My Lai killings and duly supplied an army investigator with the relevant combat report from the Division's files.

Quotes From Chairman Powell

On Counter-Insurgency

From Captain Powell's 1963 combat diary:

- "10 Feb: Rain. Located evacuated village; destroyed houses and 100 K[kilos] rice, 20 K corn. Harassing fire on 3rd Co.
- 11 Feb: Rain. Killed 3 buffalo, pigs, chickens. Harassing fire from VC.
- 13 Feb: 2nd Co. made contact with VC. Bloodstains indicate cas [a possible casualty, since we still had not seen the enemy]. Crossbows, quiver of possible poison located vicinity of river.
- 18 Feb: Sprayed 2 hec [hectares] sweet potatoes, manioc destroyed."

On War & Morality

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male. If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen, Lieutenant Colonel Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

On Hearts & Minds

“Helicopters delivered fifty-five-gallon drums of a chemical herbicide to us, a forerunner of Agent Orange.

From the drums, we filled two-and-a-half-gallon hand-pumped Hudson sprayers, which looked like fire extinguishers. Within minutes after we sprayed, the plants began to turn brown and wither. Why were we torching houses and destroying crops? Ho Chi Minh had said the people were like the sea in which his guerrillas swam. Our problem was to distinguish friendly or at least neutral fish from the VC swimming alongside. We tried to

Powell complacently recounts his role as unofficial leader of a South Vietnamese unit that destroyed peasant livestock and defoliated crops.

solve the problem by making the whole sea uninhabitable. In the hard logic of war, what difference did it make if you shot your enemy or starved him to death?"

On the Contras

“The next big question was what to do about the contras, who were still fighting the Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The back-door aid to the contras that Ollie North had arranged to get around a congressional ban had created the messiest part of the Iran-contra affair. But that fact did not detract from the justice of the contra cause.” ■

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