

Grandstanding on Terror

The House vs. Assata Shakur

In these difficult times for the republic, it's reassuring to learn that the House of Representatives can still summon the political will to indulge in anti-communist posturing. In mid-September, taking time out from ponderous pronouncements about decency, America's children and the President's genitals, the House by a vote of 371-0 passed HR 254, which calls on the government of Cuba to extradite Assata Shakur, formerly known as Joanne Chesimard.

In 1973 Assata Shakur, a well-known black activist and critic of racism and police brutality, was pulled over while driving on the New Jersey Turnpike by state police troopers who, according to Shakur, shot her with her hands raised and then shot her in the back. One of Shakur's companions was killed, another seriously wounded and a state trooper was also killed. An all-white jury inflamed by demagogic politicians and a press bent on her conviction, ignored the ballistics evidence supporting her story and convicted Shakur of murder. She was given a life sentence. Convinced that she would never get out of prison alive because of the animosity of both judges and prison guards towards her, Shakur escaped to Cuba, where she has lived ever since. (Even today, New Jersey State Troopers have a bad reputation for targeting blacks, latinos and other minorities. In April of 1998 troopers shot into a van carrying a group of blacks and latino basketball players on their way to a try-out.)

The speciousness of the House's accusations against Shakur aside, the hypocrisy of the legislators is breathtaking. If there is a place in the world that terrorists can call home, it is the United States. Our country gives refuge to convicted criminals such as Orlando Bosch, who helped blow up a Cubana airliner in 1976, killing 76 people. Bosch is currently living in Miami. The United States has refused Cuba's request to extradite Bosch and

also Emmanuel Constant, the former head of the Haitian paramilitary organization FRAPH.

The House vote ignores the legal provisions of US treaties governing international extraditions. The US government understands that Cuba has neither the intention nor the obligation to extradite Shakur; yet the opportunity to grandstand against "terrorism" was too tempting to pass up.

New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman kicked off the spectacle, when she announced a \$100,000 bounty for anyone who could bring

Gov. Christine Todd Whitman offers bounty hunters \$100,000 for Shakur, dead or alive.

Shakur to the United States, presumably alive or dead. This offer was tantamount to soliciting kidnapping or murder.

Then State Department spokesman Jamie Rubin demonstrated a similar lack of respect for due process—and destroyed any illusion that Shakur would be treated fairly if she were returned to the US—when he was asked about the extradition of Shakur and others from Cuba. "There are several people involved here", Rubin said, laughing, "and I'm fearing that I will mess up their names; but since they are prisoner-escapees, I'm not going to worry about it much."

The fact remains that the United States is bound by the terms of its 1926 extradition treaty with Cuba. Article VI of that treaty states that "a fugitive criminal shall not be surrendered...[if]...the request for surrender has, in fact, been made with a view to try to punish him for an offense of a political character." Refusal to extradite on Article VI or "political offense" grounds cannot be questioned or overruled. According to the treaty,

the decision of the country holding the fugitive is "final".

This is the very provision invoked by the US when it refused to return to Cuba two escaped murderers who had been convicted of killing a prominent member of the Cuban Communist Party in 1959. Cuba invokes it now to turn down the US request for Shakur's extradition.

Footnote: among those voting Aye on extradition were Bernie Sanders, Barney Frank, members of the Congressional Black Caucus, including John Conyers, Maxine Waters, Carrie Meek and some former Black Panthers. Attorney Michael Ratner wrote a letter to many of these legislators, outlining the issues at stake. Thus far only Maxine Waters has taken the trouble to respond in detail. She explains that this had been among supposedly "non-partisan" bills that members put their names to. Now she knows its malign content she is retracting her support and is taking other measures to express her strong dissent. ■

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(CIA, continued from page 1)

Times belittled his investigation in a three-part series by its reporter Keith Schneider, who attacked Kerry for relying on the testimony of pilots, many of them in prison. Some months after this series was published Schneider was asked by the weekly paper *In These Times* why he had taken that approach. Schneider replied that the charges were so explosive that they could "shatter the Republic. I think it's so damaging, the implications are so extraordinary, that for us to run the story, it had better be based on the most solid evidence we could amass." In other words, a written confession by the Director of Central Intelligence.

And now, over a decade later, we have a written confession from the CIA's Inspector General about the "explosive" and the "extraordinary" charges and the story ends up on an inside page on a Saturday.

The New York Time's vilification of Gary Webb was obsessive and even in the midst of his October 10 climb-down Risen cannot resist another stab at the man. Two weeks earlier the NYT Book Review featured an article on *Whiteout* and Webb's book *Dark Alliance*. The author was James Adams, a Washington-based hack who used to eke out a twilight existence as correspondent for the Murdoch-owned London Sunday Times before transferring from that lowly billet to the ignominious function of relaying Agency handouts and

news droppings from Congressional intelligence committees for UPI.

Adams levelled two charges against *Whiteout*, to the effect that there was no evidence that any Contras were running drugs, and that our book could not be taken seriously because we had not solicited a confession of guilt from the Agency. In fact, as long ago as 1985, reporters accumulated and published evidence of Contra drug running. Among these reporters were Bob Parry and Brian Barger of Associated Press, and Leslie Cockburn in documentaries for CBS. So far as Agency confessions are concerned, *Whiteout*, completed in late June and

The Times would only settle for a written confession by the Director of Central Intelligence.

published at the start of September, contained precisely the main thrust of the Inspector General's conclusions in the second volume, now discussed by Risen. Hitz anticipated this written report in his verbal testimony to Congress in May, where he acknowledged the Agency's knowledge of Contra/drug links and also disclosed that in 1982 CIA director William Casey had gotten a waiver from Reagan's attorney general, William French Smith, allowing the CIA to keep secret from other government agencies its knowledge of drug trafficking by its assets, contractors and other Contra figures.

Unlike the Washington Post, the New York Times never reported Hitz's sensa-

tional March, 1998, testimony, and in his October 10 story Risen disingenuously fails to mention the 1982 waiver Hitz disclosed at that time. The omission has the effect of implying that the Agency was somehow acting in a "rogue" capacity, whereas the 1982 waiver shows clearly that the Reagan presidency was foursquare behind the whole strategy of concealment of what the Agency was up to. As we have written on the opening page of *Whiteout*: "Whether it was Truman's meddling in China, which created Burmese opium kings; or the Kennedy brothers' obsession with killing Fidel Castro; or Nixon's command for 'more assassinations' in Vietnam, the CIA has always been the obedient executor of the will of the US government, starting with the White House.

For readers of the New York Times in its home port, the newspaper's climb-down was not nearly as drastic as in the edition distributed in the Washington, D.C. area. The edition available in New York City did not have the fourteenth paragraph (quoted above) nor indeed five other concluding paragraphs. Why? A Times editor simply chopped them off to allow space for a large Bloomingdale's ad for a rug sale, thus confirming the truth of A.J. Leibling's observation years ago that the news diet of New Yorkers depends entirely on a bunch of dry goods merchants. The full story was also available on the New York Time's web-site, but not on the Lexis-Nexis database, where it ends at the thirteenth paragraph, plus a bland and uninformative final three-line resume of the missing material. Nexis is where most people looking for Risen's story will go. ■

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