

# Our Little Secret

## THE BUSKER RIGHT

Earlier this year the busker right went into a feeding frenzy over Robert Stoll's book Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans. The word busker alludes to the London peddlers of old, singing their wares. The busker right - David Horowitz et al - do their busking to coax grant money out of half-mad right-wing billionaires like Richard Mellon Scaife. The sure way to tease out cash is to portray American political culture as all but overwhelmed by leftists intent on wiping out civilization, represented at its very finest by people like Richard Mellon Scaife and protected by sturdy guardians like David Horowitz.

Stoll's attack on Menchu was succulent fodder for the busker right. She's always been a particular irritant, since she (a) is Mayan (b) wrote a best-seller, selling even more copies than P.J. O'Rourke (c) is pro guerrilla. So news that she might have shaded the truth, somewhat misrepresented her life, came as manna from heaven. True to form, Horowitz took the Menchu case as yet another parable of the all-round moral and political rottenness of the left.

Stoll himself didn't get much scrutiny,

which is a pity. For years now it's been clear that he'd seen an upward career an anthropology best approached by carefully calibrating his political analysis to suit the temper of the times. Back in 1993 he published *Between Two Armies* in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala, suggesting, counter to left analyses, the guerillas might bear a good deal of responsibility for the carnage of the 1980s.

This posture was perhaps best symbolized by Stoll's treatment of a famous episode in where guerillas took over the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City, which was then attacked and destroyed by the Guatemalan army, with heavy loss of life. At

### Horowitz et al do their busking to coax money out of half-mad right-wing billionaires.

the time the Spanish government was so incensed by what it regarded as criminally rash behavior by the Guatemalan junta that it suspended diplomatic relations. Stoll suggests, with a bit of artful ass-covering, that the destruction of the embassy might in fact have been an act of revolutionary suicide, with the building blown up from inside by the guerrillas, including Menchu's father. Horowitz siezes on this theory with particular enthusiasm.

Stoll, it seems, speaks no Ixil. At the height of the Guatemalan army's repression he interviewed his Ixil informants in a hotel in town, in Spanish. It's fairly obvious that under such conditions any prudent Ixil would scarcely start talking to a North American anthropologist in terms of frankness about his political sympathies and enthusiasms a decade earlier. And so far as the attack on the embassy is concerned, it turns out Stoll somewhat based his theory in part on chats with two arson investigators in California. For its part the Catholic Church in Guatemala conducted a thorough review of the affair and concluded flatly that given the condition of the bodies and the other factors it was impossible to give credence to the theory that molotov cocktails ignited by the guerillas had caused loss of life. This conclusion appeared in Guatemala: "Nunca Más", published by the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights in 1998.

After two assiduous books designed to show that guerilla movements, and the supporters of such movements, are mired in romantic misconception Stoll's career is now nicely set. The right can now go on happily shouting about PC follies and the need to take Menchu's book off all college reading lists. The only inconvenience to the rejoicing was the publication at the end of February of the investigation of Guatemala's recent violent history by the UN-backed Historical Clarification Committee of Guatemala. This nine-volume report has concluded bluntly that the actual count of civilian dead across 36 years was 42,275 dead, of "disappeared", 6,159, and that the estimated total of dead was 200,000. The report reckons that Guatemala's military governments and armed forces were responsible for 93 per cent of the violence, with just 3 per cent attributed to the guerrillas. The report said some of the state's counter-insurgency operations could be characterized as genocide, and speaks of "an extermination of defenseless Mayan communities". The report also points the finger at the United States as having been part-author of this nightmare, starting with the CIA coup against Guatemala's democratically elected president Jacob Arbenz in 1954.

It wouldn't be fair to say that there was no coverage of the Guatemalan Truth Commission's report at the start of March. The major papers here all carried stories. But it's also true to say that the stories—in the New York Times for example—about Stoll and Menchu were given much livelier editorial treatment. To give a sense of comparison it's as though, in 1945, there were scores of vigorous news stories and opinion columns about a Jew presenting a slightly conflated account of the death camps and his own experiences in them and then, two months later, a somewhat smaller number of humdrum stories noting that the Nazis had murdered six million Jews.

In fact some newspapers here, the New York Times for example (in a story by Kate Doyle on March 1) saw the Guatemalan commission's report as something in which the US "can take pride... The report documents the American role in providing financial aid and training to Guatemalan Army units that committed atrocities. But what makes the findings remarkable(!) is that they are based on once-secret files provided to the Guatemalan truth commission by the United States

Editors  
ALEXANDER COCKBURN  
JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Co-writer  
CARL BROMLEY

Design  
DEBORAH THOMAS

Counselor  
BEN SONNENBERG

Published twice monthly except  
August, 22 issues a year:

\$40 individuals,  
\$100 institutions,  
\$30 student/low-income  
**CounterPunch.**

All rights reserved.  
CounterPunch welcomes all tips,  
information and suggestions.

**CounterPunch**  
3220 N. St., NW, Suite 346  
Washington, DC, 20007  
1-800-840-3683 (phone)  
1-800-967-3620 (fax)

government itself. This cooperation should set a precedent as other nations, especially in Latin American, try to come to terms with their cold war history." So: (a) undermine another's country's government, (b) train up death squads and sponsor genocide there, (c) denounce all press reports suggesting this is going on, and cause the journalists filing such reports to be discredited and fired, (d) destroy all the files you can find (e) claim a "precedent" setting moral victory when the truth finally emerges.

As for Rigoberta, what really are her sins? She did conflate accounts of brutality and death. But as the Guatemalan truth commission makes devastatingly clear, she dictated her memoir to Elizabeth Burgo-Debray at a moment when the Guatemalan army was trying to exterminate the Mayan people. The situation was exactly akin to a Polish Jew dictating a memoir, with some factual blendings, to a sympathetic American intellectual in 1943. Menchu wanted to alert the world to what was going on, and to enlist sympathy for her people. She succeeded. That's what infuriates the busker right.

## HENRY AND THAT VASE

In our February 1-15 issue we published information we had received indicating that at the conclusion of his visit to Peking in 1971 Henry Kissinger had attempted to leave with an ancient Chinese vase packed in his baggage. More than one potter of our acquaintance has expressed doubt about the speed with which a duplicate, appropriately thrown, glazed and fired, could have been turned out by a Chinese potter for substitution in the baggage. Dr. Kissinger's lawyers have not been slow in expressing their indignation at what they describe as a fabrication. We felt the utmost confidence in our source. However, the information imparted to us by the potters makes us feel that it would be fair to Dr. Kissinger, who has never requisitioned lawyers in the past when described as a mass murderer and war criminal (or any other charges we've laid to his name) if we rescind the charge that he's a klepto, not averse to stuffing a Chinese imperial vase in his valise. CounterPunch withdraws the allegation.

## EXXON'S ALASKA LEGACY

March 24 will bring us the tenth anniversary of the most notorious foul-up in the history of the oil business: the Exxon Valdez spill which took place in Prince

William Sound, 25 miles south of Valdez, Alaska around midnight when the vast 948-foot long tanker ran into Bligh reef. Over the next few days 11.2 million gallons of Alaskan crude oil poured into the Sound.

The spill fouled more than 1,500 miles of shore line. It killed more than 250,000 beaver; 26 orca whales; 2,000 sea otters; 300 harbor seals; 250 bald eagles. It turned the Sound's mussel beds into toxic graveyards and decimated herring and pink salmon stocks. Ten years later, of the 30 different species, only one has recovered, the bald eagle.

Exxon has boasted of spending \$1.5 billion cleaning up the spill, but 20 per cent — 2.5 million gallons — of crude oil remains in the Sound, either coating the mussel beds or in tarry deposits on the

## Elia Kazan did some of his snitching to HUAC in the Occidental restaurant.

shore. Exxon's cleaning crews only mopped up 15 per cent of the spilled crude. The remainder either evaporated or broke down.

America's largest oil company soon faced suits from the federal government and from native tribal and fishing communities. In 1994 a federal district court jury ordered Exxon to pay \$5 billion in punitive damages to 30,000 natives, fisherman and businesses suffering economic hardship because of the spill. To date, Exxon hasn't turned over a penny in satisfaction of that judgment. In fact the company is earning \$400 million a year in interest on the money reserved in case it's ultimately compelled to pay up. Lee Raymond, Exxon's CEO, has said that the jury award was an "excessive and unwarranted judgment". Exxon has instigated appeals and other legal maneuvers to squash it.

Meanwhile the fishing industry in the Sound remains moribund and long-term prospects for the salmon fisherman are bleak, since the pink salmon have developed what biologists call functional sterility and such fry as do get spawned are severely deformed. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reckons that the salmon and herring catch in the chief fishing port of Cordova has been roughly cut in half, an annual \$90 million loss.

Reacting to the smouldering fury of the spill's victims, Senator Ted Stevens of

Alaska put through a law forever barring a rehabbed Exxon Valdez from plying Alaskan waters. Unabashed, Exxon renamed the tanker the Sea River Mediterranean and tried to sail it back to Valdez. When the tanker was stopped, Exxon challenged the constitutionality of the 1990 Act. This bid failed and so the company filed a "takings" claim, demanding \$125 million from the federal government, on the ground its tanker had been unfairly "demonized".

The tanker's skipper at the time of the spill, Joseph Hazelwood, waited many years for the courts to decree punishment. This coming summer he will begin 1,000 hours of community service in south-east Alaska, picking up trash along highways outside Anchorage. The court has ordered him to spend a month a year in Alaska for the next five years.

Despite much public opprobrium at the time and spontaneous consumer boycotts, Exxon is doing just fine. North slope oil production has soared. The consortium operating on the North Slope — Exxon, Arco and British Petroleum — are earning after-tax profits estimated by Fortune magazine at over \$3 billion a year. Even after production begins to decline in a couple years, the state of Alaska predicts the three companies will be earning profits of more than \$2 billion a year.

Did the spill produce federal regulation to guard against such contamination in the future? The answer is an emphatic No. The companies are even resisting having their tankers escorted by tug boats through the Sound.

The Clinton administration has been lissome in its posture towards Big Oil. By contrast, Washington senator Slade Gordon, a Republican, has told the administration that it should hold up the impending merger of Exxon and Mobil until the former pays the \$5 billion fine.

## THE SNITCHING POST

Elia Kazan, now in intensive rehab courtesy of the Motion Picture Academy, did some of his first snitching to HUAC investigators in the Occidental restaurant near Capitol Hill. This was where Christopher Hitchens and his wife Carol Blue had the lunch with Sidney Blumenthal that more recently figured in Hitchen's affidavit to House impeachment managers. Perhaps the Occidental should theme its decor and artwork: everyone from Thomas Kyd to Whittaker Chambers. ■

# US Official Poisoner Dies

**S**idney Gottlieb, who for more than two decades managed the CIA's Technical Services Division, died on March 10. His obituaries in the New York Times and the Washington Post tended to focus on Gottlieb's testing of LSD on himself and other CIA officers, portraying him as a kind of Merry Prankster, the CIA's very own Ken Kesey.

In fact, with Gottlieb's death, America has lost its prime poisoner. For many years, most notably in the 1950s and 1960s, Gottlieb presided over the CIA's technical services division and supervised preparation of poisons, experiments in mind control and administration of LSD and other psychoactive drugs to unwitting subjects. Gottlieb's passing comes at a convenient time for the CIA, just as several new trials involving victims of its experiments were being brought. Those who had talked to Gottlieb in the past few years say that the chemist believed that the Agency was trying to make him the fall guy for the entire program.

Incredibly, neither the Times nor the Post obituaries mentioned Gottlieb's vile role in the death of Dr. Frank Olson, who worked for the US Army's biological weapons center at Fort Detrick. At a CIA sponsored retreat in rural Maryland on November 18, 1953, Gottlieb gave the unwitting Olson a glass of Cointreau liberally spiked with LSD. Olson developed psychotic symptoms soon thereafter and within a few days had plunged to his death from an upper floor room at the New York Statler-Hilton. Olson was sharing the room with Gottlieb's number two, a CIA man called Robert Lashbrook, who had taken the deranged man to see a CIA-sponsored medic called Harold Abramson who ran an allergy clinic at Mount Sinai, funded by Gottlieb to research LSD.

The night Olson made his terminally abrupt descent from the hotel window the New York police asked Lashbrook to turn out his pockets. On a piece of paper were initials GW and MH, identified later as George White and Morgan Hall, White's alias. White was retained by Gottlieb to run a CIA safehouse at 81 Bedford St in Greenwich Village, in cooperation with Harry Anslinger's Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, for which White had previously worked. Gottlieb's men fixed up the house with one-way mirrors listen-

ing devices and secret cameras. From the fall of 1953 to the spring of the following year White threw parties on Bedford St, dosing his guests with sodium pentothal, Nembutal and of course LSD. Later White moved the CIA operation to San Francisco, with the same sort of set-up. He hired prostitutes to dose the guests, in an exercise known as Operation Midnight Climax. The encounters were filmed. On the walls White put photos of women being tortured and whipped. Another senior CIA man, John Gittinger would interview the hookers about their drugs and sex habits. Gottlieb flew out to visit the safe house at 225 Chest-

---

## The experiments failed. The electrodes were removed, the men were shot and their bodies burned.

---

nut Street several times a year.

Gottlieb was a man of darkness. He sponsored research by the infamous Dr Ewen Cameron, a world famous shrink who had a clinic in Montreal at McGill where he dosed unwitting subjects (who had entered voluntarily for psychiatric treatment) with huge jolts of electricity through their brains, plus drugs plus lobotomies. Many people had their lives thus destroyed in Cameron's research, financed by Gottlieb and also by the Rockefeller Foundation. Cameron invented a particularly ghastly process called "psychic driving" whereby drugged and shocked patients, whom Cameron believed he had wiped clean of their previous personalities, would have tapes played sixteen hours a day, dictating their new personalities.

From time to time the patients, given Thorazine, Nembutal and Seconal, would be hauled off, administered amphetamines as a wake-up call, then got jolted with ECT at voltages forty times greater than was considered safe at the time. Cameron died of a heart attack while mountain climbing in 1967. The CIA eventually settled with some of Cameron's victims.

Gottlieb also funded the experiments of Dr. Harris Isbell. Isbell ran the Center for Addiction Research in Lexington, Kentucky. Passing through Isbell's center was a captive group of human guinea pigs in

the form of a steady stream of black heroin addicts. More than 800 different chemical compounds were shipped from Gottlieb to Lexington for testing on Isbell's patients. Perhaps the most infamous experiment came when Isbell gave LSD to seven black men for seventy-seven straight days. Isbell's research notes indicates that he gave the men "quadruple" the "normal" dosages. The doctor marveled at the men's apparent tolerance to these remarkable amounts of LSD. Isbell wrote in his notes that "this type of behavior is to be expected in patients of this type"--meaning black men.

Gottlieb's research was never a case of pure science. He was a practical man. From the beginning, Gottlieb saw himself as part of the operational wing of the CIA. Even the forays into LSD research, Gottlieb saw as testing for a potential chemical warfare weapon. He arranged a contract with Eli Lilly to produce synthetic LSD "in tonnage quantities". The aim was to have enough acid to incapacitate large populations and armies.

By the early 1960s Gottlieb's techniques and potions were being fully deployed in the field. Well-known is Gottlieb's journey to the Congo, where his little black bag held an Agency-developed biotoxin scheduled for Patrice Lumumba's toothbrush. He also tried to kill Iraq's general Kassim with a handkerchief doctored with botulinum and there were the endless poisons directed at Fidel Castro, from the LSD the Agency wanted to spray in his radio booth to the poisonous fountain pen that was handed to Rolando Cubela on November 22, 1963.

Even less well remembered is one mission in Gottlieb-backed mind control that occurred as part of the CIA's Phoenix Program in Vietnam in July of 1968. A team of CIA psychologists set up shop at Bien Hoa Prison outside Saigon, where NLF suspects were being held after Phoenix Program round-ups. The psychologists performed a variety of experiments on the prisoners. In one, three prisoners were anaesthetized; their skulls were opened and electrodes implanted by CIA doctors into different parts of their brains. The prisoners were revived, placed in a room with knives and the electrodes in the brains activated by the psychiatrists, who were covertly observing them. The hope was that they could be prompted in this manner to attack each other. The experiments failed. The electrodes were removed, the patients were shot and their bodies burned. ■