



Nuclear materials missing

“This is the kind of subject that sends chills up my spine,” muttered Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) as he prepared to convene a special August session of the House Subcommittee on Energy and Power.

Dingell's chilling subject was the effectiveness of the nuclear safeguards program for weapon-grade uranium and plutonium. A report in his possession disclosed that tons of nuclear material were missing, and Dingell's investigatory staff had “strong suspicions” that at least part of the valuable uranium and plutonium had been stolen and clandestinely shipped to Israel in the mid '60s.

More disturbing still, at least some of the evidence implicated the Central Intelligence Agency in the theft.

Although officials are still tight-lipped about the case, this information is now the foundation for at least two congressional investigations, a Justice department probe and quiet inquiries by American intelligence officials.

These allegations, however, are only the latest of a long series of troubling disclosures about the government's accounting system for weapon-grade nuclear material. Just last year the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which licenses nuclear corporations, reported that security measures at all 15 domestic manufacturers and processors of uranium and plutonium failed to meet minimum federal safeguards standards.

Enough missing for 1000 bombs.

Another round in the matter came on August 9 when federal officials from the Energy Research and Development Administration and the NRC conceded that they cannot locate upwards of 17 tons of U-235, U-233 and Pu-239, referred to as Special Nuclear Material or SNM.

It's enough fissionable material to arm more than 1,000 atomic bombs packing the explosive power of the device dropped over Hiroshima in 1945.

Only 5 kilograms (11 pounds) of en-

riched Uranium-235 or 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of Plutonium-239 are needed to build a crude nuclear device.

The revelations taint both the American military program and the civilian nuclear program, almost all of which is controlled by private companies.

On the military side ERDA officials disclosed that they cannot account for 16 tons of SNM at atomic bomb factories at Oak Ridge, Tenn. and Portsmouth, Ohio.

Under intense questioning, moreover, ERDA Acting Administrator Robert Fri conceded before Dingell's subcommittee that the 16 ton figure “was only an estimate” and that the loss could be higher.

Dingell himself was not satisfied. He charged that both ERDA and the NRC were still withholding data on the real magnitude of the problem. “There are now two accountability issues,” he complained. “First, there is the problem of material which is unaccounted for and then there is the new problem of material which is unaccounted for but which is not reported as being unaccounted for.”

The phrase “Material Unaccounted For” or MUF is only one of the terms used by the government for nuclear material they cannot locate. Recently ERDA euphemistically recategorized the missing Special Nuclear Materials as merely an “Inventory Discrepancy” or ID.

“Diversion” to Israel.

By far the most serious allegation involves a privately-owned nuclear processing plant in Pennsylvania. Congressional investigators and internal federal documents released under the Freedom of Information Act indicate that in the mid '60s 178 kilograms, or about 400 pounds, of highly enriched Uranium-235 was stolen from the Nuclear Material and Equipment Corporation (NUMEC) in Apollo, Pa.

At the time of the diversion the now

defunct Atomic Energy Commission had approved a NUMEC research and development contract with the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Ostensibly the material that NUMEC was to send to Israel was Cobalt-60 portable irradiators.

But as others tell it, NUMEC supplied the crucial atomic bomb material, valued at \$1.1 million, to Israel for its secret Dimona nuclear facility. According to *New York Times* correspondent David Burnham, “A former top level intelligence official said he had once seen a report that Israel had stolen nuclear material.”

Michael Ward, an aide to Rep. Dingell, told reporters on August 9 that he had “strong suspicions that a diversion occurred” at the NUMEC plant.

Rep. Morris Udall (D-Ariz.), who is also investigating missing nuclear material as head of the House Energy and Environment Subcommittee, said in an interview for *In These Times*, “We may never know whether there was a diversion, but it's darn hard to prove that there wasn't.”

Graver still, there is a widespread belief among investigators that the CIA may have had some involvement in the clandestine shipment to Israel. Government sources who subscribe to that theory say the material may have been covertly taken from the NUMEC plant on the basis of directives from high-level officials from the Johnson Administration.

Kenneth Chapman, who until late last year was director of NRC's Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards division also suggests that there must have been “some very high level involvement in the diversion.”

Information withheld.

Last July a nuclear safeguards expert who was probing the Apollo case for the NRC was summarily transferred from his job after he charged in internal memos that his division was not getting access to classified information “held by other agencies” that could prove whether the Apollo security system had

been penetrated.

The official, James H. Conran, a senior analyst in Chapman's division, discovered that the documents dealing with the Apollo incident were still considered “highly sensitive” over ten years after the loss was detected by the AEC.

According to a summary of enforcement problems at the NUMEC facility, the case was referred by the AEC to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1966. But for reasons that have not been explained, the FBI declined to investigate.

This year, as the Apollo scandal began to surface, the Justice department reopened the case for review, and, according to knowledgeable government sources, the matter now rests with Attorney General Griffin Bell. Bell's office has declined to comment on the present disposition of the case.

The NUMEC incident raises basic questions about the ability of the government and private contractors to safeguard nuclear facilities from theft, nuclear critics say.

“I'm deeply troubled with the prospect of a great expansion of nuclear power plant production,” says Udall. “If with just a few nuclear plants we can't even keep track of nuclear material, I really fear for where we'll be if the world gets a couple of thousand nuclear plants and a large number of breeder reactors.”

NRC's director of the Division on Safeguards, Carl H. Builder, warned last year in an internal memo that existing security at all commercial Special Nuclear Material plants was inadequate. “Safeguards are not adequate against the lowest levels of design threat that have been suggested,” he concluded.

The problem may become even more serious if commercial reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel is licensed for the controversial breeder reactor. Enough nuclear material would then be produced each year to arm over 1,000 nuclear bombs.

Richard Pollock is director of the Critical Mass Energy Project in Washington, D.C.

A flurry of recent government studies has revealed that tons of nuclear material cannot be located, enough to manufacture thousands of nuclear bombs. There are indications that some of it was sent to Israel in the '60s.



Bert Lance is the definite Washington outsider, while Clark Clifford (in the background) is the ultimate insider. Only an issue of extreme importance could bring the two together.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Economic policy underlies the Bert Lance issue

By Alan Wolfe

Clark Clifford is the ultimate Washington insider, a man who serves his country by gaining the confidence of presidents and subtly shifting their views around to his. Bert Lance is a definite outsider, a gregarious and public figure whose loyalty is neither to a class nor a system but to one man. Yet these two men, so different in every respect, sat together in mid-September facing a Senate committee that seemed unsure of what it wanted to ask. The issue that brought together a Clifford and a Lance in a unified front must have been a serious one indeed.

That issue was not sloppy banking practice. Lance was undoubtedly right to claim that he did nothing contrary to the mores of his profession. Gigantic firms like Chase Manhattan can cringe at the folksiness of Lance's practices while in Georgia, but this is the way smalltimers operate. Nor was the issue the administration of the Office of Management and Budget, since Lance left the professionals there in charge.

Carter stayed loyal to Lance to the point of political damage to himself. Why did this politically astute president not force Lance's resignation sooner?

There is a reason for the long delay in Lance's departure. It has to do with the question of the role government should play in the economy and the importance of Lance's answer to it.

During the New Deal economists close to the Democratic party began to discover how valuable government could be in preventing serious disturbances in the economy. When defense spending during World War II brought the U.S. out of the Depression, they realized that from this moment on the economy and the state were inextricably linked.

But the question of the form that government spending should take to preserve prosperity was not so clear. Some argued that the purpose of government spending should be to redistribute income in order to win popular support for the system. Others suggested that since it did not matter how the money was spent—the important thing was simply macro-economic stimulation—spending the money on matters dear to the hearts of businessmen would win their support, something crucial to the Democratic party if it was to remain in power.

Clark Clifford was a key advocate of domesticated Keynesianism and promoted defense spending as an ideal way to stimulate the economy and win establishment support for the Democratic party at the same time. Based in part on his advocacy, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson all chose Keynesian techniques that involved business stability more

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LABOR

Prospects for a military union setback

Congress is out to prevent any form of military organizing

By Michael Uhl and
Tod Ensign

The effort to unionize the armed forces suffered a major setback in early September when it was announced that locals of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), the union contemplating the drive, had voted four to one against implementing the controversial unionization plan.

AFGE's decision was apparently influenced by the near-unanimous opposition to military unions that has been gathering momentum on Capitol Hill and in the Pentagon. Many AFGE members were also reluctant to undertake a new organizing commitment because they feel the union is not doing an adequate job representing its current membership.

In the two months before AFGE called it quits both the Defense department and the Senate Armed Services Committee launched comprehensive attacks on unionizing activity by uniformed servicemembers.

On August 15 Defense Secretary Harold Brown issued a new set of regulations designed to severely cripple, if not totally suppress, any organizing attempt. The new regulations prohibit commanders from bargaining with any group representing GIs, and bars individual soldiers from conducting strikes, work stoppages or any concerted activity that "obstructs or interferes with the performance of military assignments."

In the Senate South Carolina's Strom

Thurmond attacked Brown's administrative directives for not going far enough and introduced a bill to outlaw military unions. The report accompanying his bill (S.274) offers Thurmond's reasoning: "The directives, while suggesting the urgency of the problem, cannot provide direct sanctions against the unions themselves."

Brown, however, defended his preference for regulations by arguing that legislative efforts would be more vulnerable to "adverse court decisions" that might lead to greater restrictions on the military's ability to suppress union activity than exists at present.

Thurmond's bill, however, with 50 Senate sponsors, has the lead in the race to outlaw GI efforts toward self-organizing and labor's desire to expand its territory. S.274 was unanimously approved by Thurmond's colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, including two erstwhile "doves," Gary Hart (D-Colo.) and Tom Culver (D-Ia.).

On September 16, the bill was approved by the full Senate, with only three "no" votes (McGovern, Metcalf, and Abourezk). The AFL-CIO, according to one Senate staffer, made "no effort" to defeat the anti-union measure.

The bill now moves to the House, where no significant opposition is anticipated. Jimmy Carter has taken no public position on the legislation.

The implications of the Thurmond legislation are much broader than they appear to be on first reading, say critics, who argue that the bill poses a threat to the rights of GIs, trade unionists and civilian organizers. Specifically, they charge that rights to free speech, assembly, association and petition are seriously undermined by the bill's terms.

The bill, they say, is also an attack on

the network of anti-militarist activists and counsellors that has grown up since the anti-war activities of the '60s. This loosely-coordinated network has provided individual servicemembers with support and representation in conflicts with the command structure.

Thurmond's bill strikes at these groups by presenting a sweeping definition of "labor organization." Under the bill any group that has as one of its objectives, "the participation in the process of resolving individual complaints or grievances in the chain of command," is deemed a "labor organization" and subject to the act's criminal sanctions.

Not only can't unions sign up GIs as members, but the existing right of National Guard and Reserve "technicians" to union representation will also be withdrawn under S.274's provisions. This will affect over 60,000 federal employees who work in "dual status" where membership in a Guard or Reserve unit with part-time duty in uniform is a condition of employment. Warning that this "germ of unionization" might infect the whole military, the bill strips these workers of their union membership and contracts.

The anti-union campaign in Congress has been assisted by the public relations efforts of two far-right organizations: Americans Against Union Control of Government and the Heritage Foundation's Americans Against Big Labor. Using mail and polling techniques originally developed by the George Wallace campaigns, these two groups mailed millions of "opinion surveys" that condemn the "unchecked menace" of public employee unionism. Soliciting the addressee's response to heavily-biased questions like, "Should soldiers disobey

lawful orders due to demands from union officials?", the "surveys" include a strong pitch by Senators Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) or Jake Garn (R-Utah) for funds to operate a multi-million dollar anti-union crusade.

However the anti-union legislation fares in the months ahead, military union proponents say that it will not alter the underlying conditions of military life that spawn pro-union sentiments. "It will do no good for Congress," says AFGE's Pres. Ken Blaylock, "to ban unionization and proceed headlong, ignoring signals being sent by rank and file military personnel." Such signals, observers say, are flashing brighter than ever, with the frequency of unit-level punishments, volume of AWOLs, and rates of attrition prior to completion of normal duty tours, all at near-record levels.

During the Vietnam war, they say, the resistance of soldiers, including the ultimate refusal to carry out combat missions in the field, didn't depend upon directives from union stewards or civilian "agitators." While perhaps not as consciously "political" as their war-time predecessors, today's young trooper seems even less willing to endure the arbitrariness of command authority.

In an essay on contemporary service life, Professor Ezra S. Krendel refers to recent Navy research that studied criteria for enlistment among 16-22 year olds. It found that "fate control" or dislike for authoritarian leadership, petty regulations, and the illicit use of power, was the main consideration in any enlistment decision. If this is so, then we've not heard the last word on military unions from those who are directly affected.

Michael Uhl and Tod Ensign work with the New York-based Citizen Soldier.