

**A**S IN THESE TIMES WENT TO PRESS, NOBODY else did. Which is to say that the mainstream media remains supremely skeptical about reports in this publication that the Reagan-Bush campaign allegedly cut a deal with Iran in 1980—not to bring the 52 American hostages home, but to keep them in Tehran to ensure Jimmy Carter's election defeat.

Like virtually all of the nation's major dailies, the *Washington Post* has not comprehensively examined the purported deal on its news pages. On October 9, however, the *Post* did publish an op-ed piece by *London Sunday Times* correspondent Mark Hosenball that characterized the alleged deal as "a rumor that just won't die."

**Surprise, surprise:** Hosenball's article, titled "If It's October...Then It's Time for an Iranian Conspiracy Theory," concluded that evidence of the alleged 1980 deal is "too shaky to be taken seriously." But it's clear that Hosenball himself didn't take the evidence seriously from the start: he appears to have selected only those facts that suited his theory and ignored ones that didn't. The result is a cursory dismissal of a story that deserves a much more in-depth investigation. Consider the following examples.

- Many unanswered questions surrounding the alleged deal concern a documented meeting in the fall of 1980 among Reagan campaign aides—Robert McFarlane, Richard Allen and Laurence Silberman—and a man who reportedly said he was representing the Iranian government. The three Americans have since suffered a case of group amnesia about the details of the meeting—even forgetting the name of the man they met with. To get to the bottom of the episode, Hosenball went to McFarlane, who told him "nothing happened."

But Hosenball did not point out that McFarlane is hardly a reliable source. Not only could he face possible criminal prosecution by admitting to the alleged deal, but he is also a self-confessed liar on such matters. In the Iran-contra scandal, for instance, he told Congress he had not solicited money from other countries for the contras. In fact, he had. He later explained his false congressional testimony in this way: "I was trying to use some tortured language—inappropriately I think."

Perhaps "nothing happened" was also "tortured language."

- Other circumstantial evidence about the alleged 1980 deal comes from the suspicious timing of arms shipments to Iran. The Carter White House had embargoed arms to the Khomeini government in late 1979—and asked U.S. allies to do the same (see *In These Times*, October 12). But soon after Ronald Reagan took office, Israeli arms flowed to Iran—with the approval of Reagan administration officials.

Hosenball failed to mention this Reagan administration approval when he wrote that there was no "corroborating evidence" linking Israeli arms flow to an alleged deal. He then pointed to a book by Michael Ledeen. In it Ledeen maintains "that following the hostage crisis, the Israelis simply resumed what had been a consistent Israeli policy toward Iran."

Hosenball identified Ledeen as a "former (National Security Council) consultant"—by implication, an impartial expert. But Ledeen is far from impartial when it comes to Israel. In 1981 he founded the Jewish Institute for National Security, a Washington-based

# Post takes aim at 1980 story, but misses mark



group that lobbies for Israeli defense interests. Furthermore, in 1985 it was Ledeen who came up with the idea of sending Israeli arms to Iran in an effort to better U.S.-Iranian relations—an idea that led to the Iran-contra scandal. As an active participant in U.S.-Israeli-Iranian arms dealings, his motivations are, to say the least, questionable.

- One controversial allegation made by some individuals connected with the 1980 investigation is that Vice President Bush attended a meeting in Paris with Iranian representatives in October 1980. It is important to note, however, that none of the publications that have printed in-depth probes of the alleged deal—*In These Times*, *Playboy* and the West German newsmagazine *Der*

*Spiegel*—has given these allegations about Bush more than passing mention. Nonetheless, Hosenball refuted the allegations about Bush at some length. And his story demonstrated that he did not bother to investigate fully what it was that he was refuting.

For example, he reported that arms dealer Richard Brenneke "testified to U.S. District Judge Jim R. Carrigan last month that he was present at a meeting in Paris with George Bush, William Casey, other Reagan aides and representatives of Iran." But in fact, Brenneke did not name Bush as one of those who participated in the meeting that he attended (see *In These Times*, October 12). Brenneke only offered hearsay—he reported that his friend, pilot Heinrich Rupp, had told him that

he had seen Bush on the tarmac at a Paris airport on Oct. 19, 1980.

Brenneke's 67-page deposition was readily available to reporters like Hosenball. But he apparently based his information on an article in the *Rocky Mountain News*—a story that contained incorrect information.

- Brenneke, the major source of an October 12 report by *In These Times*, is a controversial figure in Washington, and Hosenball rightly examines his credibility. To that end, Hosenball repeated a CIA assertion that Brenneke's claims of past employment with the agency are false. But the CIA's public denial of affiliation with the arms dealer was based on a document that the agency said it received from the *Portland Oregonian* newspaper. The *Oregonian*, however, denied ever having the document or supplying it to the CIA. (For more information on this controversy, see "Going to the source: the debate over Richard Brenneke's credibility" in the October 12 *In These Times*.) Hosenball apparently never questioned the CIA denial's legitimacy.

- In his conclusion Hosenball wrote: "Frank Askin, a Rutgers professor who is a part-time adviser to a House Judiciary subcommittee headed by Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), said that he had examined the allegations but that a full-scale congressional investigation presently appeared unlikely."

Readers might interpret this to mean that Askin did not find sufficient evidence to warrant an investigation, but that is not the case. "I have suggested [an investigation]," Askin subsequently told *In These Times*. "I have talked to other committee staff members, and nobody really thought there was any legislative jurisdiction—particularly on an issue that as soon as anybody touched it somebody would scream 'politics.'"

"My personal opinion? Things were going on in high places," he continued. "I think there is a significant amount of circumstantial evidence that indicates some representatives of the Reagan-Bush 1980 campaign were having secret negotiations with Iranian officials regarding the hostages. What the outcome of those negotiations was is very hard to determine. You can jump to conclusions based on subsequent events like the arms that started flowing to Iran in the early '80s. You have to piece a lot of things together. But for those people who want smoking guns, there are no smoking guns."

Askin concluded: "I think there is enough circumstantial evidence and [the alleged deal] is so important that it is certainly worthy of investigation. Who should do that investigation? At least the historians and journalists."

**News that doesn't fit:** While many major newspapers have told *In These Times* that they are aware of the alleged deal, none has opted to pursue the allegations in print. And after Hosenball's article in the influential *Washington Post*, even fewer may be willing to join the ranks of what he called the "rumor mongers," "conspiracy theorists" and "afficionados of intrigue."

Hosenball may in the end be correct: the alleged 1980 deal may prove to be a series of historical coincidences, or it may prove to be a complex disinformation scheme hatched by people like Brenneke.

But for now Hosenball's arguments that the Reagan-Bush campaign did not conspire with Iran in 1980 are dwarfed by evidence suggesting it did. The holes in his superficial investigation of the alleged deal only point out the need for more serious probes by news organs like the *Washington Post*. □

**On October 9 the *Post* published a piece by *London Sunday Times* correspondent Mark Hosenball that characterized the deal as "a rumor that just won't die." He selected only those facts that suited his theory and ignored those that didn't.**



## Illinois

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shopping center on Chicago's southwest side, she talked of her concern about the environment, frustrations with "Republican" cuts in benefits at the postal service and difficulties finding good child care. She also worried about how she would end up in old age, noting that her grandmother was recently shifted to an inadequate nursing home.

"A friend of mine in Canada was shocked when he heard we have to pay for every doctor visit," she said. "They can do it [provide health care for everyone]. Why can't we?"

Times have been tough for Raznieski and her husband, a construction project planner, especially when she quit her job to have her son. "Personally our situation is terrible," she said. "We were so in debt. We just cut out all our charge cards. I always said I'd never work while I had kids. But here I am."

"We don't have a house yet, and I can't see us getting one for years," she continued. "I had wanted five children, and here I can barely afford one. I'll probably end up with two children and no house of my own. To me, the economy hasn't been very good lately." Yet this made-for-Dukakis voter is not in the bag—due to lack of both excitement and understanding how Dukakis might better serve her needs than Bush.

Mary Demchuk, an "over 50" short-order cook from the blue-collar suburb of Chicago Ridge, is a swing voter who backed Reagan in 1984 ("everyone is entitled to a mistake," she explained). "I think it's time for a Democratic president," she said. "I think they're

more concerned with the needs of the people... I think [Dukakis] is a common man's president. His little comment about his 25-year-old snowblower in his garage helped. I can appreciate that. Bush is financially set, and he's too wishy-washy. He should have put his foot down on the whole arms deal to Iran, and of course, having Quayle, a bad choice, added fuel to the fire."

But Fernando and Marivel Frias, both second-generation Mexican-Americans whose families are intensely Democratic, will probably either not vote or go for Bush. The young couple—he's a real estate salesman, she's an airline worker finishing a manage-

### Even made-for-Dukakis voters are not sure bets. For example, farmers may be turned off by Bush, but Dukakis isn't winning them over.

ment course—are uninformed and uninterested in politics. But they believe they're doing all right financially and fear change. They said they might have been interested in a candidate stressing college aid, but then they dismissed the prospect. It wouldn't do them any good, since Marivel soon graduates. Bush clearly benefits from the growth and legitimacy of rampant selfishness.

**Defensive on defense:** Esther Patt, a tenant union director and Dukakis partisan in Champaign-Urbana, twin downstate uni-

versity towns, found people surprisingly undecided because "on issues where there is a clear difference between the candidates, voters still don't know how the candidates stand." For example, cutting spending for Star Wars was a top priority for one undecided voter, she said, but he didn't identify Dukakis with that position.

In western Illinois, Phil Hare, district coordinator for populist Democratic Rep. Lane Evans, said many farmers "are turned off to Bush, but Dukakis isn't winning them over. [Dukakis] needs to talk to people on their level, tell them who he is, talk about education, health care and his plans to get the country going. I don't find support for heavy-duty weapons systems in the district. People are fed up with spending billions on weapons that don't work." But scared of being labeled soft on defense, Dukakis has so far failed to capitalize on those widespread sentiments against open-checkbook military spending.

The vacuousness of the Dukakis campaign not only gives swing voters little reason to swing toward him but also does little to inspire the faithful. "At first he was kind of dull," observed Velma Maxwell, a retired packinghouse worker and Jackson backer who was at the Regal rally. "Now he's really into the fight. Now he's stronger. I like him better. He's coming on to what working people need. This nation is in need of good health care. I want to get people off public aid and get them jobs, get these homeless people out of the doorways and give them jobs. I want the candidate to talk about that."

Dukakis' appearance at that black rally helped to erase a growing feeling of neglect, argued Tony Shaw, a 30-year-old black owner of his own business. But "he'll have to do more to get black people out to vote," Shaw said. "The circles I run in, I couldn't get people to come today. There's a lot of feeling it won't make any difference whoever gets in."

The *Wall Street Journal* recently mocked the wealthy Massachusetts governor for including himself with his black or working-class audiences as "the rest of us" as opposed to the rich beneficiaries of the Reagan-Bush years. But voters are less interested in the personal finances and more in the policies, the style and the sense of personal understanding a candidate uses to demonstrate he is part of "the rest of us." Dukakis falls short of that mark in all ways. But in substance he's still way ahead of—although in campaign gimmickry behind—Bush in the battle for Illinois' crucial 24 electoral votes. ☐

## Black leaders

Continued from page 8

ments of the urban black population creating a social milieu significantly different from the environment that existed in these communities several decades ago," Wilson wrote. This conclusion has been strongly seconded by several analysts. And, although few of them suggest re-segregation as an answer, the implications of their findings have not escaped those who condemn all integrationist strategies as inimical to the good of the black community.

Robert Woodson, president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, has edited a compilation of essays, titled *On the Road to Economic Freedom: An Agenda for Black Progress*, that faults the civil rights fraternity for the continuing deterioration of black inner-city neighborhoods. In an essay he contributed to the collection, Woodson argued that "those who purport to serve the black poor must be held accountable and must offer realistic programs that inspire self-help to alleviate the conditions of the underclass. The ultimate goal, after all, is economic independence and self-sufficiency."

**The other strain:** Most of the essays make similar arguments about the need for aggressive self-help strategies to replace what many contributors contend are the outdated strategies of traditional black leadership. These arguments make the case for the other major strain of the African-American struggle for racial justice: separatism/nationalism. The integrationist, or civil rights, strain has been ascendant since the anti-Depression policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt lured blacks away from their virtually unanimous support of the Republican Party.

"It is to make a mockery of the ideal of freedom to hold that, as free men and women, blacks must nonetheless sit back and wait for white America, of whatever political persuasion, to come to their rescue," wrote contributor Glenn Loury, a black economist at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

In content and emphasis, many of these arguments recapitulate the conservative logic that has become such a hit during the Reagan era; notions of values, character development and the work ethic are central to many of the essays. However, they also echo the self-help philosophies of leaders like Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X.

Those ideas are gaining in popularity as black Americans, chastened by the reign of Ronald Reagan, seek more effective methods to halt the accelerating deterioration of their communities. The electoral adventure of Jesse Jackson was good for a thrill and a spot in the history books, but the Democratic Party's continued aversion to significant black input has once again reminded them of the need for independent political strategies.

New York City's black leadership, once regarded as the vanguard of the new black movement but now fractured in the wake of the Brawley imbroglio, has regrouped around the spurious issue of what some have termed "mercantile imperialism." It is an attempt to bring clarity to the phenomenon of immigrant merchants gaining increased control of the black community's commercial activity. So far, however, the issue seems only to have provoked an anti-Asian racism (see *In These Times*, Oct. 5) that is a dead end than was a previous campaign to defend Rev. Sharpton's integrity. ☐

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By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**P**OISON GAS HAS A BAD IMAGE. NATIONAL leaders who want to build up stocks of chemical weapons need to venture into the field masked.

That is what Presidents Reagan and Mitterrand seemed to be doing with their September speeches to the United Nations General Assembly, stressing their earnest desire to rid the world of chemical weapons.

Certainly, neither Ronald Reagan nor François Mitterrand can have any particular affection for nerve gas. No matter how you look at it, it is not likeable stuff. However, they preside over the two governments that have taken the lead in reviving production of chemical weapons and in blocking international negotiations to end their fabrication.

In 1983, with the helpful tie-breaking vote of Vice President George Bush in the Senate, the Reagan administration resumed the chemical arms race. Production of the "new generation" of binary weapons was begun last December. The 1982 U.S. Army doctrine AirLand Battle calls for them to be projected onto the modern electronic battlefield by missiles.

Meanwhile, at the 40-nation disarmament negotiations in Geneva, talks were underway on a new treaty that would go beyond the 1925 Geneva Protocol's ban on using chemical weapons, and fix a ban on manufacture and stockage. The old U.S. excuse for not concluding a ban, namely that the Soviet Union would not allow verification, collapsed. Soviet negotiators not only accepted verification but went on to propose a control system using permanent teams of international inspectors to check destruction of chemical weapon stocks and inspect factories producing hypertoxic substances. A year ago the Soviets invited more than 100 experts from the Geneva conference to visit a new factory on the Volga devoted to destroying the Soviet chemical arsenal. U.S. negotiators were harder and harder put to find reasons to reject Soviet overtures.

America's oldest ally, France, came to the rescue. In late 1986 a new military programing law called for a French "deterrent" arsenal of chemical weapons, on the grounds that "France could not give up weapons other nations think they have the right to possess." France claimed a right to keep a "security stock" of chemical weapons in a secret place for 10 years while Superpower stocks were being destroyed. In French logic, every smaller country had the right to build up a "security stock" and hold it while waiting for the Superpowers to get rid of theirs. The French position was so obstructionist that U.S. negotiators could sit back and look reasonable.

**Change in the air:** Now suddenly, as if struck by a whiff of crocodile tear gas, Reagan and Mitterrand were practically bumping into each other in their rush to the international podium to deplore the spread of noxious fumes and appeal to the "civilized world" to stop it.

Before the U.N. General Assembly, Reagan called for an international conference to strengthen the 1925 Geneva protocol. Mitterrand followed, even offering to sacrifice the "security stock" for an eventual treaty banning chemical weapons production. At Reagan's suggestion, the conference will be

## Chemical weapons fear helps fill threat deficit

in Paris.

French spokesmen explained that Mitterrand was inaugurating a new era of disarmament in French policy. French media sent out the good news.

### EUROPE

Serious experienced observers were deeply skeptical. There are indeed more reasons to be skeptical than not.

The Franco-American move away from obstructing the Geneva negotiations toward sponsoring a new Paris conference seems dictated above all by the necessities of threat shift. Threat shift is a main ideological task of the Western alliance in the late '80s. The Soviet threat is fading as fast as the Cheshire cat, leaving only Gorbachov's winning smile. Obviously, Western military establishments cannot get along without a threat. So they are having to upgrade, rapidly, the spare threat: the threat from the Third World. The chemical weapons hoopla is a prime instance of threat shift.

Only last year, French diplomats were justifying their intransigence by the Soviet threat. In February 1987, Foreign Minister Jean-Bernard Raimond told the Geneva conference that France would not accept any moratorium on chemical weapons. A production ban "might mean total chemical disarmament for small holders while those retaining big stocks would go on having a major capacity until the end of the process," he said, defending the little guy.

**Small isn't beautiful:** Suddenly, the tune has changed. The little guy is the danger. The problem is proliferation in the Third World. Word is leaked to the semi-official media: Libya has chemical weapons.

This is not exactly new. Nearly 10 years ago, in preparation for the binary buildup, the U.S. began touting an imaginary yellow peril dubbed "yellow rain." Brandishing a contaminated leaf described by Richard Burt as a "smoking gun," the Reagan administration accused Vietnam and the Soviet Union of using chemical weapons. While Vietnamese continued to die of the aftereffects of massive U.S. use of Agent Orange in Indochina, and Harvard biologist Matthew Meselson and Canadian investigators disproved the "yellow rain" fiction, U.S. officials went on accusing the Soviet Union of "flagrant violation" of the 1925 Geneva protocol.

Just as the "yellow rain" story was being refuted, Iraq began using chemical weapons against Iran in a big way. This was indeed a "flagrant violation," but the visibly gassed corpses of Iranian soldiers or of the Kurdish village men, women and children have never excited U.S. officials as much as one Laotian leaf.

Starting in 1983, the Iraqis systematically used chemicals both defensively and offensively against Iran. Last March, Iraq wiped out civilians in the Kurdish town of Halabja after it fell to Iranian forces. An August report by United Nations experts accused Iraq of "intense and frequent" use of chemical weapons in the Gulf War. Iraq used gas sys-



tematically to prepare breakthroughs in the last big offensives against Iran. "This can be one of the main reasons for the drastically reduced fighting morale of the Iranians last spring," the specialized weapons journal *Europäische Wehrkunde* suggested, concluding that the example is likely to be contagious since "nothing is more convincing than success."

**Smokescreen:** Superficially, the speeches by Reagan and Mitterrand can appear to be moral reactions against the Iraqi use of chemical weapons. But this illusion vanishes on close inspection.

In his United Nations speech, Mitterrand suggested an arms embargo against any state using chemical weapons—just as France was secretly negotiating a big new arms contract with its No. 1 customer, Iraq. Two days later, in Washington, French Defense Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement said France had no proof that Iraq had used poison gas against the Kurdish population.

The French government has no domestic opposition to worry about on the chemical weapons issue. However, complaints were coming from Germans.

Mitterrand seems to have sacrificed the "security stock" on the altar of the Franco-German partnership. The Germans do not relish being the potential battlefield for American, Soviet and French nerve gas, and have been pushing for a negotiated ban. The West German Social Democrats and East German leaders have already worked out a draft treaty for a chemical weapons-free zone in Central Europe that could be adopted—not only by the two Germanys, but by Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary as well, and perhaps Denmark and the Benelux countries—if the Social Democrats are returned to office in Bonn two years from now.

This is the sort of dread prospect Mitterrand wants to stave off by his new emphasis on "disarmament policy." The object is to "anchor Germany to the West"—to the Western arms buildup, that is.

Once Reagan turned from the Geneva negotiations to the idea of a conference, the danger of a negotiated ban on chemical weapons receded. There was no longer any reason for France to antagonize everybody by blocking an agreement that can't happen anyway.

Unopposed Iraqi use of poison gas has done the job of creating a Third World threat of proliferation that can effectively be cited to scuttle the proposed ban on chemical weapons production. Iraq's Western backers let Iraq get away with the crime, and now say that the fact that Iraq got away with it proves that chemical proliferation cannot be stopped by treaty.

**The brass wants the gas:** What then is the proposed conference all about? This remains to be seen, but the first thing it does is to shift attention from negotiations for a total ban to "stopping proliferation." This can mean simply that the major industrial powers want to maintain control of the flow of chemical weaponry to Third World clients.

Since 1985, experts from 19 Western nations have been meeting secretly at the Australian Embassy in Paris to study ways to restrict the export of chemical arms components. The object of this "Australian group" is not to ban chemical weapons, but to check their proliferation. An international conference may be asked to adopt devices they have worked out.

Pressure for chemical weapons development and production comes from the chemical industry, an extremely powerful lobby in every country, which does not want to be left out when subsidies are passed around in the form of arms contracts. On verification, U.S. negotiators maintain a double standard between Soviet factories, which should be inspected because linked directly to the state, and American factories which are "private." Soviet willingness to exchange full inspection is blocked by the arrogant American argument that the Russians are just trying to spy on the wonderful achievements of private capitalism.

The industry's unwillingness to allow inspection is covered by the argument that inspection would be impossible. It would surely be difficult. But a good inspection system, combined with serious sanctions against violations, would at least stop massive official incorporation of chemical weapons into national arsenals. Since when has the impossibility of watertight prevention of crime been an excuse for having no laws?

Behind the shifting "threat" pretexts, the constant political factor explaining the Reagan administration's attachment to chemical weapons is that they are basically crowd pesticides. In an age of accentuating gaps in wealth and power, those on the top want to retain their capacity to liquidate the masses on the bottom. Whether lethal or merely disabling, most chemical weapons distinguish between military or police personnel wearing masks or other protection, and civilians. Those that don't are too dangerous to use in any battle. Missiles will enable U.S. forces to use them to exterminate populations from a distance.

France may be tagging along because of its ambition to maintain its role as auxiliary police power in Africa and various islands.

The poor man, woman and child will be on the receiving end of the "poor man's weapon." □