

Tower debacle opens crisis of the Bush presidency

by Webster G. Tarpley

In the late afternoon of March 9, the U.S. Senate refused, by a vote of 53-47, to confirm the nomination of former Sen. John Tower to become Secretary of Defense. Disregarding for the moment the specific arguments against Tower offered by Sam Nunn (Ga.), George Mitchell (Me.), Ernest Hollings (S.C.), and other Democratic senators leading the opposition, it is clear that the rejection of Tower constitutes a devastating political defeat for Bush, and opens an aggravated crisis of his presidency, just about 50 days after his arrival at the White House.

Bush's defeat is unprecedented. No President has ever seen his cabinet nominee rejected by a formal Senate vote so early in his first term. The closest recent parallel is the January 1977 failure of Theodore Sorensen to be confirmed as the Director of Central Intelligence. That takes us back to Jimmy Carter, to whom Bush is increasingly compared.

One by-product of the defeat of Tower will be the re-opening of the Iran-Contra scandal in a new depth, in ways that will be most unpleasant for such personages as White House counsel C. Boyden Gray, would-be Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Donald Gregg, and other Bushmen. In particular, the British dimension of Irangate, which has tended to be eclipsed by the scandal's Israeli ramifications, will now be fully ventilated.

The recrudescence of Irangate has to do with the prehistory of the Tower appointment.

On Feb. 26, 1987, John Tower joined with Brent Scowcroft and Edmund Muskie in submitting to President Reagan the "Report of the President's Special Review Board," dealing with the Iran-Contra scandal. This report was a coverup for George Bush. The Tower report, in its section entitled "Failure of Responsibility," singled out White House Chief of Staff Don Regan, National Security Advisers McFarlane and Poindexter, and CIA director Casey. Weinberger and

Shultz were mentioned, but largely exonerated. Astoundingly, the section in question made no mention of Vice President George Bush, head of the Special Situation Group (SSG) and Crisis Pre-Planning Group (CPPG), the one White House official charged with oversight for operations of the Iran-Contra type. Certainly a remarkable oversight for such a distinguished board of inquiry. But sure enough, after Bush had been elected, Scowcroft was made the National Security Adviser, and Tower was put up for boss of the Pentagon.

The heart of the Tower Review Board was thus the following vulgar *quid pro quo*: Whitewash Bush, protect the succession, and a nifty post in the cabinet or the White House will be yours. One only wonders what Muskie got. There is no doubt that the circles around Britain's Lord Victor Rothschild intend to bring these matters to critical mass.

Bush came to the White House determined to exercise a bureaucratic crisis-management dictatorship: in practice, a police state staffed by pointy-headed bureaucrats, yuppies, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, federal regulators, IRS snoopers, FBI agents, and CIA provocateurs. The model was a government above society, seemingly independent of society, or independent enough to attack most groups in the society at the same time. Bush arrived on the scene as the caricature of "Bonapartism," following more the model of Weimar Germany's Chancellor Heinrich Brüning (in power 1930-32) than Napoleon I or Napoleon III. This is the kind of unstable, unpopular, but repressive police-state regime which typically arises at the onset of a severe economic crisis if the ruling elite refuses to change its policy, but rather decides to crush opposition to continuing on the discredited road chosen.

Brüning attempted to consolidate an austerity dictatorship based on a state of emergency and rule by decree, dealing with bank failures and economic collapse into the Great Depression by crushing unions, lowering salaries, and cut-

ting the budget. After being placed in power by President Hindenburg, Brüning used the police, the courts, and the state bureaucracy against his opponents on the left and right. Brüning created the economic and institutional preconditions for the seizure of power by Nazism. Less than one year after Brüning left office, Hitler assumed the Chancellorship. Von Papen and von Schleicher, who came in between, relied even more heavily on the army, the Reichswehr, to shore up their rule. Where bonapartism is, the army cannot be far behind.

In the United States of today, a strong tendency toward the mobilization of military forces for day-to-day civil administration is reflected in the proposals to call out the National Guard to stem the tide of murder and narcotics traffic in cities like Washington, D.C.

George Bush and his team came in with a script very much of this type. Since Bush is the first CIA boss to assume the presidency, it should surprise no one that the current brand of bonapartism has a heavy covert operations component. Bush is the most ambitious experiment in bonapartism undertaken by the Republican Party since Roscoe Conkling attempted to nominate Ulysses S. Grant for a third term in 1880. Since Bushmen are consummate bureaucrats, driven by the Nietzschean *will to power*, the idea of a bureaucratic dictatorship is congenial to them. They hardly need the advice of Evans and Novak and the London *Financial Times* to crush the union locked in a dispute with Eastern Airlines. Bush has fully accepted the Wall Street line of total confrontation with the labor movement demanded by Frank Lorenzo's masters at Chase Manhattan Bank. Wage-gouging, union-busting, and asset stripping will be necessary, in their view, to finance their attack on the savings and loan associations, plus whatever bailout of international bank lending Treasury Secretary Brady may at length recommend.

Part of Bush's difficulty arises from the fact that the framers of the Constitution were well aware of the dangers of such bureaucratic tyranny: They were contemporaries of Napoleon's coup d'état of *Brumaire*. The separation of powers stipulated by the Constitution is a stumbling block to bonapartists of all types.

An instructive parallel may be drawn between Mr. Bush's troubles of today and the limits that circumscribed the power of even such a consummate politician as Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt came into office in 1933 under depression conditions with a corporatist-fascist program summed up in the Mussolini-style National Recovery Administration. In those days, it was the "nine old men" of the Supreme Court, much more than the Congress, who rejected the first New Deal and much of the second as well, and thus obliged Roosevelt, against his will, to go back to the drawing board and come up with the new policy signalled by the shift from "Dr. New Deal" to "Dr. Win the War." Roosevelt was defeated in his plan to pack the Supreme Court by act of Congress in the spring of 1937, at the beginning of his second term; this was his first resounding defeat at the hands of Congress.

George Bush, bureaucrat and no politician, has tasted the same bitter rebuff—50 days into his first term.

Behind the destabilization

Who is destabilizing Bush? On one level, it is Lord Victor Rothschild, of the Anglo-Russian Trust, who seeks to turn Irangate into Bushgate on general principles. On another level, it is the Bank for International Settlements crowd in Basel, Switzerland, including Alan Greenspan and most of the Federal Reserve. These are the figures who dictate articles to the *Financial Times* warning that the Bush budget is heading for a stalemate in Congress, and that "no news is bad news" in this regard. This group seeks to weaken Bush to impose full International Monetary Fund conditionalities and austerity on the United States. Then there is Henry Kissinger, whose Watergate record shows that his bureaucratic rivals are often hit by scandals. And indeed: Tower has been knocked off, and Baker tarnished, but the press has shown no interest for the Midgetman conflicts-of-interest of Kissinger's man Scowcroft. Only Senator Helms has shown an interest in Eagleburger's foreign dealings.

The active opposition to Bush on the ground includes such figures as senior Democratic Party power broker Clark Clifford, CIA old boy William Colby, AFL-CIO chief Lane Kirkland, Katharine Meyer Graham of the *Washington Post*, and the usual gang of network news anchormen. A significant part of the FBI must be ill-disposed toward Bush, since it was the FBI which mercilessly hyped the soap-opera drinking and womanizing charges against Tower. It is also the FBI which is now prolonging the security checks on Bush's Executive branch nominees to six and seven weeks, using the pretext that the Bureau had been criticized when its probe of Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg did not prove thorough enough. The FBI has thus contributed to the paralysis of Foggy Bottom, the Pentagon, and other departments while NSC, CIA, Justice, and the FBI itself are fully staffed.

More fundamentally, what destabilizes Bush is the ham-handed ineptitude of his team. At the outset, Bush postured about ethics, but then James Baker and Boyden Gray turned up with severe conflicts of interest. The fiasco of Bush's trip to the Far East was matched only by the debacle of Baker's whirlwind tour of Europe. The savings and loan crisis, Ibero-American debt, the FSX fighter plane for Japan, interest rates, the possibility of a strike wave, and, of course, the second crash are so many time bombs ticking away. Bush's handlers are using tactics that would have worked fine under Nixon, Ford, or most of Reagan: their bumbling derives from the fact that we have crossed into an historical crisis manifold where the stratagems of yesteryear no longer work.

Bush will now undergo a series of stunning reverses. Will he show the intelligent opportunism of his fellow patrician Roosevelt, and jettison his initial policies and advisers? If not, this country will face a crisis that will make Brüning's austerity look positively idyllic.