

# Iran-Contra affair haunts the President

by Herbert Quinde

The Iran-Contra affair just won't go away. In the wake of the defeat of Sen. John Tower's nomination to be defense secretary and revelations in the ongoing trial against Oliver North, some international press outlets continue to highlight President Bush's vulnerability to new exposés arising from the worst foreign policy disaster of the Reagan-Bush years.

The *Observer*, a Vienna, Austria-based magazine, early in March ran a front-page article charging that the jailing of Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. is part of a cover-up for Bush's role in the Iran scandal. Referring to the government's decision to drop charges against LaRouche in Boston, since he had already been convicted in Alexandria, Virginia, the *Observer* reports, "The continuation of the trial in Boston would have uncovered Bush's handwriting behind the operations against LaRouche as well as the cover-up of Bush's leading role in the Iran-Contra scandal." The article detailed the activities of Bush's White House counsel C. Boyden Gray, who cooperated with FBI and CIA "sting" operatives Gary Howard, Ron Tucker, and Fred Lewis in the illegal Cointelpro-style infiltration of "the LaRouche organization."

The Catholic daily *Avvenire* from Milan, Italy reports in an article of March 10, entitled "Long Knives for Tower," that Bush's troubles are just beginning. It reviews recent British media coverage of Bush's strong defense of Senator Tower during the confirmation process which ended in Bush's first devastating political defeat. *Avvenire* characterizes Bush's commitment to Tower as a debt repaid for keeping the former vice president's name out of the Tower Commission's report on the Irangate fiasco. The *Avvenire* piece ends this way: "Was Bush really the responsible party for all this mess? There are people in London who want others to believe it. If the game is successful, very gloomy days will start for the new U.S. President."

## The North trial

Further trouble is brewing in the trial of Oliver North. Former President Ronald Reagan could find himself in North's shoes in the not-so-distant future, as a result of the testimony given by former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane during the second week of March.

McFarlane testified that Reagan had called the President of Honduras to ensure that ammunition destined for the Contras would get through a bottleneck created by some Honduran military brass, in exchange for \$100 million in economic, military, and covert aid. McFarlane confirmed that this hap-

pened while the Boland Amendment was in effect, prohibiting assistance to the Nicaraguan rebels.

McFarlane, who was North's boss at the NSC, also testified that Ronald Reagan did not want Congress to know about funds donated by foreign countries to support the Contras—funds which were used to keep the rebels supplied with weapons and equipment, after Congress cut off aid. If the plan to fund the Contras via third countries gets out, "we'll all be hanging by our thumbs in front of the White House until they find out who did it," said Reagan, according to the minutes of a June 25, 1984 meeting of the National Security Planning Group (NSPG), testified McFarlane.

President Reagan never told him explicitly to lie to Congress, said McFarlane, but "he did say, when learning of the contributions of a foreign country, do not share that information with Congress."

Vice President George Bush attended that June 1984 meeting, along with top officials of the CIA, State and Defense Departments, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Bush seems to have engaged in some bureaucratic sophistry at the NSPG meeting, saying he could not understand "how anyone could object to the U.S. encouraging third parties to provide help" to the Contras. "The only problem that might come up is if the United States were to promise to give these third parties something in return so that some people could interpret this as some kind of exchange," said Bush.

But McFarlane testified that indeed a *quid pro quo* arrangement did exist. "Many of us," said McFarlane, including himself and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. John Vessey, felt that "we ought to help" countries willing to aid the Contras financially.

Besides the Honduran deal, McFarlane told the court that in May 1984 he met with Prince Bandar, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to Washington, and was promised a \$1 million donation. It was "pretty obvious," said McFarlane, that the Saudis wanted to give the money "to gain favor" with the administration. The Saudis donated \$32 million to the Contras. Reagan was briefed about the Saudi donation, McFarlane testified: "He made clear to me that no one should know, and let's keep it that way."

Mindful of their conspiracy, McFarlane said that at one point in the NSPG meeting, someone asked whether their plan might be an impeachable offense, but the suggestion was rejected by those in attendance.

At times emotional, McFarlane told the court that Reagan told him and his staff to somehow keep the Contras fighting. Reagan "let us know very clearly in that spring of 1984 . . . that we were to do all we could to keep them together, body and soul."

Reagan's order not to share information with Congress is at the center of North's defense strategy. His attorneys argue that he has been made a scapegoat for the policies of his superiors, and that he was just following their orders.