

Editorial

Soviet justice from American courts

As you read this, *EIR* Far East expert Michael Billington will have begun to serve a 77-year sentence in a Virginia prison.

The circumstances of his case are so extraordinary that they should open the eyes of many Americans to the bitter fact that American and KGB justice have become virtually indistinguishable. The peoples of the former Soviet Union have unequivocally rejected the tyranny under which they were forced to live in that barbaric regime; a majority of the U.S. population has yet to make its voice heard in protest against this judicial barbarism.

How can it be that Billington received a 77-year sentence for an alleged securities fraud involving \$56,590? Such a white-collar crime in any nonpolitical case would at most call for a six-month to three-year sentence, as occurred in the case of junk bond king Michael Milliken, who stole billions. Had Billington been an armed robber, he would have received nothing like this more-than-life sentence.

The Commonwealth of Virginia allows jury sentencing and has yet to enact appropriate guidelines which would restrict jury excesses. The judge, the Virginia Appeals Court, and the State Supreme Court all refused to reduce the sentence.

The Billington case is stranger still. Michael Billington chose to argue his case before a jury, despite indications that he could not get a fair trial in the state of Virginia. This decision was opposed by his lawyer, Brian Gettings, who took the extraordinary step of trying to have Billington declared mentally incompetent by the court, for having requested trial by jury—a fundamental legal right of all Americans. As a result, Billington was forced to undergo a psychiatric examination about his political associations with Lyndon LaRouche, on the grounds that he was a member of a LaRouche “cult.”

Michael Billington was ruled sane by the court, but Judge Clifford Weckstein would not allow Billington to replace Gettings as his lawyer, despite the fact that Gettings refused to argue before the court on Bill-

ington's behalf, but in fact collaborated with the prosecution to induce the jury to find Billington guilty.

During this whole period, and in fact for 100 days, Billington was held in solitary confinement and refused telephone access to paralegal assistance and even his own wife. The aim was to break his will and force him to confess his guilt and to testify against his former associates, in particular LaRouche.

Another legal outrage is the fact that the Virginia state trial placed Billington in double jeopardy, because he had already been tried and convicted in a federal court for precisely the same transactions deemed in Virginia to be a securities fraud. In point of fact, Billington had raised money in the form of loans, to finance the presidential campaign of LaRouche, and other political activities. These loans were classified as securities, under a Virginia law which was passed *after* the date when the transactions took place, and in fact after the indictment of Billington for the supposed crime.

He had been convicted in federal court along with LaRouche, on the same evidence and with the same witnesses, only this time the issue raised was the fact that the loans were not repaid in a timely fashion. For this “crime,” Billington has already served three years in a federal prison.

Michael Billington is an exceptional human being. In his youth he served in the Peace Corps, and throughout his life he has served the same ideals which inspired him then. He has recently made the statement that he would far rather be free—in prison—than a slave outside by perjuring himself. He is a brave man, and he is a fierce opponent of all forms of tyranny; but he is more than that.

Michael Billington has been an inspiration to all of us who have worked with him here at *EIR*, because he has a truly joyous personality. His spirit will not be dimmed by the brutality of present American justice, but we will miss his presence. We ask all of you, our readers, to join with us in working to free Billington and every other victim of a U.S. justice system which is corrupt and barbaric.