

LaRouche charges Reno with political corruption

by Debra Hanania Freeman

Congressional concern is mounting, as new evidence in the continuing investigation of a pattern of rampant corruption within the permanent apparatus of the U.S. Department of Justice, continues to emerge. And, as the pieces are put together, it is becoming more and more evident, that Attorney General Janet Reno, once considered an "outsider" by her department's career bureaucrats, has played a key and persistent role in covering up for both her predecessors and her subordinates (including such members of the permanent bureaucracy as John Keeney and Mark Richard, whose names continue to come up in almost all the cited cases) in wide-scale judicial abuse.

Lyndon LaRouche served five years in federal prison as a result of a politically motivated prosecution—a prosecution that former Attorney General Ramsey Clark said "represented a broader range of deliberate cunning and systematic misconduct, over a longer period of time, utilizing the power of the federal government, than any other prosecution by the U.S. government, in my time, or to my knowledge." On April 2, LaRouche charged that the new revelations "not only corroborate my own experience with the Department of Justice's Criminal Division, but also my experience with the Attorney General. My attorneys, Odin Anderson and Ramsey Clark, went to Janet Reno with evidence of a clear pattern of political corruption in her department, and asked her to conduct the internal review; instead, she conducted a cover-up."

President Clinton's growing dissatisfaction with his Attorney General's performance in this area is no secret. At the time that President Clinton came into office, the clean-up of the pattern of judicial abuse in the Bush-Reagan Justice Department, was considered one of his highest priorities. However, after the Waco debacle, Janet Reno, along with her FBI Director, Louis Freeh, became key players in covering up for the abuse.

The truth about 'Lost Trust'

Now, as the Justice Department scrambles to defend itself against stinging charges of gross prosecutorial misconduct, contained in an 86-page decision handed down on Feb. 28 by U.S. Federal District Judge Falcon Hawkins, dismissing the notorious "Operation Lost Trust" frame-up cases in South Carolina, a story has been leaked to Associated Press, containing allegations that Hawkins's landmark decision may have been motivated by his close friendship to U.S. Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.).

The controversy centered on a phone call which Hollings made to Reno on Oct. 28, 1994. Hollings, who at the time was chairman of the Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Appropriations Subcommittee, was extremely concerned about the department's handling of charges that federal prosecutors had seriously violated the law in order to win a series of cases in Lost Trust, and asked the Attorney General to personally review the matter.

Earlier, in February 1994, when the DOJ had been ordered to investigate allegations that federal prosecutors had broken the law in order to obtain the Lost Trust convictions, the investigation was referred to the department's Office of Professional Responsibility. On Oct. 18, 1994, the OPR filed a report, completely clearing former U.S. Attorney Barr Daniel, who was the lead prosecutor, despite strong evidence against him.

Hollings called Reno after a meeting with Charleston lawyer Lionel Lofton, himself a former Assistant U.S. Attorney, who represented B.J. Gordon, one of the former members of the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus who had been entrapped in the illegal sting operation. Lofton, and defense attorney Joel Collins, who represented the late former Rep. Luther Taylor (Luther Taylor, 47, died of pancreatic cancer in late March, just a month after finally clearing his name),

were extremely dissatisfied with the OPR's findings, and were desperate to talk to someone at Justice who could be trusted to get to the truth, and who had the authority to do so. They asked Hollings for help. Hollings called the Attorney General to set up a meeting.

A total of 28 South Carolina lawmakers, lobbyists, and other officials, most of them African-American, were caught up in the FBI sting during 1989-90. The majority of the Lost Trust defendants were either pressured into guilty pleas or were convicted; only one was acquitted after trial.

The widely publicized case represented the largest single attack by George Bush's Justice Department on black elected officials and their white allies; it decimated the black leadership of the South Carolina legislature, and, although he was not among those indicted, the scandal sabotaged the 1990 gubernatorial campaign of Democratic nominee Sen. Theo Walker Mitchell, sending Republican Carroll Campbell to the State House. Later, defense attorneys successfully used court filings to advance long-held suspicions among Democrats that not only was the sting operation politically and racially motivated, but that federal prosecutors had, at the same time, refused to pursue widespread allegations of corruption among some of the state's most powerful politicians, including then-Gov. Carroll Campbell.

Yet, despite the fact that this was one of the highest profile federal cases of the 1990s, as well as the fact that the court had ordered her department to review the case, Reno claimed not to know anything about Lost Trust. She did, however, promise Hollings that she would look into the matter, and "do the right thing."

Wolves guarding the henhouse

Reno's idea of doing "the right thing," consisted of referring the case back to the Office of Professional Responsibility—the very outfit that had covered up the wrong-doing in the first place—in effect asking them to investigate themselves! Ten days later, on Nov. 4, 1994, Lofton and Collins found themselves meeting, not with Reno, as they had hoped, but with the OPR officials whom they knew were corrupt. They asked OPR to reopen the investigation, but, not surprisingly, the OPR stuck to its findings, and refused.

On Feb. 28, 1997, U.S. District Judge Falcon Hawkins, in an order dismissing the indictments against five of the Lost Trust defendants, including former lawmakers B.J. Gordon and Luther Taylor, said that he was doing so because local federal prosecutors, specifically Barr Daniel (whom OPR had cleared) and their Justice Department superiors, had knowingly used false testimony from their star witness, acted in bad faith, withheld exculpatory evidence, worked to prejudice the political atmosphere for the trial, and ignored federal regulations, in their pursuit of a guilty verdict.

The Hawkins opinion specifically singled out the OPR, saying that it had failed to disclose exculpatory evidence "from the beginning of these cases until just several months

ago [a period of seven years], amounting to a pattern of conduct." Further, the misconduct was not only serious, but "repetitious, flagrant, and long-standing."

The Justice Department has responded to this ruling by filing notice that they intend to appeal Hawkins's ruling, and by leaking the story of the Hollings phone call to Reno in a blatant attempt to create the image that Hollings attempted to improperly interfere or influence the scope of the department's investigation, despite the fact that experts agree that Hollings actions were neither illegal or improper.

Reno 'kept the whitewash'

Hollings has responded angrily. "Lionel Lofton came to me and said he needed to talk with someone high up in Justice about the truth, about the OPR whitewash. And, it was a whitewash," he said. Hollings said his call to Reno was made not only in the name of constituent service, but in compliance with his oversight responsibilities. "Unfortunately," Hollings said, "it didn't work. She kept the whitewash."

Some Republicans have charged that since Falcon Hawkins is a close friend of Hollings, his former law partner and whom he proposed for appointment to the federal bench, Hawkins's order was intended as a boost to Hollings, a blow to Daniel, and a potential electoral challenge to Hollings by Campbell in 1998.

Hollings responded that such charges did more harm to Campbell than to anyone else. "Why would anyone think this would get Campbell? I think they'd better watch what they're talking about." Hollings pointed out that the Lost Trust ruling could only hurt Campbell if he had been, somehow, involved in setting up the illegal sting to affect the gubernatorial election. Campbell declined to comment.

The senator was staunch in his defense of Hawkins. "I'm very proud of Falcon Hawkins, and of his record. When I nominated him for the federal bench, it was because I knew that he not only knew the law, but that he would uphold the law, no matter what." He indicated that that was more than he could say about the Attorney General.

Reno's actions in attempting to coverup for blatant corruption in both the Lost Trust and LaRouche cases, are just two instances in a repeating pattern. In 1994, when the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Justice Department had knowingly committed a massive "fraud upon the court" in setting up Cleveland autoworker John Demjanjuk for trial in Israel, Reno moved quickly to appeal, and has kept that case tied up for three years. Her role in covering up for abuses in both the Ruby Ridge and Waco cases remain largely unaddressed. And, the full implications of the recent exposé of FBI evidence tampering at the FBI's crime lab in Quantico, Virginia, have yet to be revealed. When examined together, it is hard to imagine how the repertoire of practices employed by Reno can be viewed as anything but her own complicity in "political corruption," as LaRouche has charged.