

## Weld, Burns admit they tried to trap Meese

by William Jones

Former Assistant Attorney General William Weld was questioned in hearings called by the Senate Judiciary Committee on July 26. Weld, who was irked by national news reports about his alleged pot-smoking, was not especially keen on having to testify before the Senate Committee. Weld and Deputy Attorney General Arnold Burns, who had resigned together on March 29 in a well-publicized move aimed at forcing the ouster of Attorney General Edwin Meese, were asked to appear before the Committee to clarify the background to their resignations.

There was plenty, indeed, to clarify. Weld and Burns were key players in the faction that ran the Justice Department, on behalf of the Eastern Establishment, as the judicial arm of what is rapidly becoming “liberal” fascism in the United States. Weld and Burns made an unsuccessful bid for a cold coup against Meese—that stubborn representative of the old-line Reagan grouping—and when their effort failed, they quit, in a last-ditch effort to destabilize the attorney general.

The pair’s co-thinker, former Associate Attorney General Stephen Trott, was responsible for the indictment of former NASA administrator James Beggs, whose ouster from the space program led directly to the disaster of the Space Shuttle *Challenger*. Beggs was later absolved, all criminal counts against him dropped—after his career was ruined. When the White House asked Weld to apologize, Weld refused.

It was Weld who led the ongoing persecution of Lyndon LaRouche and associates, which made a travesty of the 1988 presidential campaign.

Finally, it was Weld and Burns, together with Trott and others, who designed the attack on the Pentagon, the one institution of government that still functioned, the one locus of opposition to the Establishment’s “New Yalta” scheme of accommodation to the Soviet Union.

The calling of the hearings had more to do with election-

earing, than with setting the record straight. “Corruption in government” is one of the issues chosen as a main item for the Dukakis presidential campaign. Putting Ed Meese in the pot, and “keeping the pot boiling,” was therefore of prime concern for the Ted Kennedy-led committee. But during the questioning, Weld momentarily found himself in the pot.

Burns and Weld entered the room somewhat subdued. It was obvious that the hearings were not entirely of their making—or to their liking—although they intended to make the most out of the opportunity to present their case to the public and perhaps to groom themselves for a more important role in some future administration.

The drama, however, took a comic turn, as Arnold Burns tried to mobilize a rather pathetic courtroom style for the benefit of the packed house—and the TV cameras. “My decision to leave the Department of Justice,” said Burns, “was not based on any hard feelings or personal animus toward the attorney general or anybody. To this day, I still do not harbor any of these feelings. I am not angry. I have no axe to grind. I continue to be only sad.” Burns explained how getting the appointment as deputy attorney general “was like winning the Irish Sweepstakes. It was the highlight of my life.” The decision to resign was, however, “made with a heavy heart. It was the saddest day of my life,” he intoned.

Undoubtedly the sadness was heightened by the fact that it was Arnold Burns and not Ed Meese who had left the Department of Justice, as had been the original plan.

It was obvious from the testimony that the conspiracy against Meese had been well worked out by Weld and Burns, with Weld running most of the show—including convincing Burns to resign together with him. “In March 1987, during a weekend that I was spending with Mr. Meese at a Justice Department conference, I received a telephone call from William F. Weld, the Assistant Attorney General in Charge of the Criminal Division, who shared with me information

he had received from the United States Attorney in the Southern District of New York, Mr. Giuliani. He told me that there were serious allegations against the attorney general growing out of the investigation in the Southern District of New York of the Wedtech Corporation and involving the attorney general's relationship with one E. Robert Wallach and others." On May 11, 1987, Burns, in his capacity as acting attorney general (a post he held when Meese was out of Washington), asked Independent Counsel James McKay to begin investigation of the case.

In that way, the net laid to ensnare Meese was broadened. Burns stated, "We had very carefully constructed a working partnership among our professional lawyers in our Criminal Division under the leadership of Mr. Weld; Rudolph Giuliani, the United States Attorney in the Southern District of New York, one of our ablest prosecutors; and Mr. McKay, to ensure that there was no slippage between the cracks in the boardwalk."

After the initial apparatus was set up, it was to be only a matter of time before the downfall of Meese—after which Burns and Weld would step in to take over at the DoJ. Burns tried to base his case on Meese's relationship with investment banker E. Robert Wallach. In a tone of righteous indignation, Burns claimed that Wallach was financially benefiting from his relationship with Meese to the tune of over \$1 million.

Burns expressed concern at the growing "malaise" in the Justice Department because of the continual "rumor-mongering" around the Meese case. "During November of 1987, I began to realize that with the investigation of Mr. Meese still unresolved, and with its scope seemingly continuing to grow, the morale and performance of the department would continue to deteriorate and public confidence in the Department of Justice would continue to erode." The McKay investigation continued to drag on, without any concrete results forthcoming. Burns himself says that he "was figuratively on my prayer bones, hoping that the investigation of Mr. Meese would be resolved." His prayers, however, were not answered. At the point at which it was apparent that Meese was not going to resign as a result of the atmosphere of public scandal which had been fomented around the case, and that the independent counsel might come up empty-handed, Burns and Weld decided, as Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) expressed it, to "pull the pin," by resigning, although because of Meese's tenacity, it blew up in their own faces.

### **Meese fights the Justice 'cabal'**

Meese went on the offensive on July 25, when at the National Press Club in Washington, he pointed the finger at Weld and Burns as the instigators of this witchhunt. Meese said that "the record shows that if a competent and thorough preliminary investigation had been directed by the then-deputy attorney general and the former head of the Criminal Division, there would likely have been no cause even for referral to an independent counsel."

Weld, although a somewhat cooler customer than the histrionic Burns, was visibly put off by the hearings. Since Meese had resigned, Weld said, "the question arises whether the necessity for this hearing has not been mooted by events." The witchhunt had been successful. Meese had resigned—but he was not down for the count.

After making the obligatory allusion to how he considered Meese "a highly intelligent and able man" and a "wonderful man to work with," Weld went in for the kill. His testimony was primarily a list of 63 "facts" dealing with the relationship between Meese and Wallach, which he claimed incriminated Meese. Weld said that he, on the basis of the facts presented to him, would have, contrary to McKay, approved the case for prosecution. Weld clarified that as a prosecutor, he considered himself "on the aggressive end of the spectrum—not the crazy end." He boasted that he had a 97% conviction rate in Boston in 3,000 cases during his tenure as U.S. Attorney, and in the area of corruption, he convicted 108 out of 111 cases before him.

After Weld's testimony, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) attacked the notion of the "deep malaise" which Burns had alleged existed at the Department of Justice, by citing numerous statements from DoJ officials as to how the department had increased its crime-fighting capability and record during Meese's tenure. Both Burns and Weld were then put on the hot seat by Sen. Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.), who lashed out at their attempts to induce others at the department to resign with them, in order to enhance the impact of their own resignations and to make the whole affair a major press item.

"Why didn't you just plain resign," asked Humphrey, "if you felt that your ethics, your standards, shall we say, that the department was not meeting your standards, that you felt you couldn't continue to associate with the attorney general? Why didn't you just resign instead of trying to organize a cabal?" Weld said that they wanted to steer a middle course between going quietly and going out "blasting the attorney general on the steps of the Justice Department." "Now, maybe we cut the salami too close to one end," said Weld apologetically.

Humphrey then took up the case of the witchhunt against James Beggs. "The Beggs case," said Humphrey, "is a classic case of someone being driven from office, his reputation being impugned, his family life surely turned into a nightmare." Humphrey asked Weld if he didn't think that this was an outrage. Weld said that it was a matter of "acute embarrassment for the department."

Then the cold prosecutor revealed something of the real ugliness inside. "If anybody hated to dismiss that case, it was me. I rode into town saying, 'white collar crime is my number-one priority.' That case was the number-one white collar case pending when I hit Washington. . . . And my first significant action in the area," whimpered Weld, "is to dismiss that case."