

Within a Month! The Bringing Down of Bobby Ray Inman

by Murray N. Rothbard

On December 16, President Clinton named retired Admiral Bobby Ray Inman to fill the post of secretary of defense. To say that the nominee was universally hailed would be a masterpiece of understatement. To pundits, media people, politicians, and leading "well-informed sources" inside the Beltway, Bobby Ray Inman could walk on water. He was the perfect choice to bring order and prestige to Clinton's troubled and screwed-up foreign and military policies. Bobby Ray was brilliant, sober, knowledgeable, the Insiders' Insider, Mr. Intelligence. When Bobby Ray retired from many years of public service in Washington in the early 1980s, and returned to Texas, the reporters at Austin put on an affectionate show in his behalf, singing, to the tune of "Jesus Christ, Superstar": "Bobby Ray, Superstar/Are you the messiah that they say you are?" Clearly, Washington greeted his return on December 16 with the fervent answer. Yes!

Moreover, Inman had come highly recommended. The main person pushing for his appointment within the administration was Clinton's First Friend in the Trilateralist Establishment, Rhodes Scholar and Oxford roomie Strobe Talbott, now deputy secretary of state, and secretary of state-in-waiting. Inman's coronation seemed secure.

And yet, in just three weeks from that date, on January 16, Bobby Ray Inman, reeling from bitter attacks by *New York Times* columnist Bill Safire, attacks seconded by a couple of other media people, decided to withdraw from the fray. He waited a couple of weeks to tell the president, until Clinton's mother's funeral and his Russian trip were out of the way, and then Inman went out in a blaze of fury, in a remarkable televised press conference on January 18, less than a week before his Senate confirmation hearings were slated to begin.

The almost monolithic response by the media

was the most instructive and revealing aspect of the Inman Affair. Almost exclusively, the media focused on speculations of the supposedly odd psychological state of mind of Admiral Inman. How could Inman retreat just because Bill Safire and a couple of other columnists were criticizing him? How could he possibly conjure up a "conspiracy" between Safire and Senator Dole to attack him and besmirch his character? Inman talked about "sources" but he couldn't *prove* his charges, could he? Inman was denounced as remarkably "thin-skinned," his behavior in charging conspiracy treated as "weird" and "bizarre," and the general reaction echoed that of Senator Dole: that someone harboring "fantasies" of this sort was not really equipped to be the captain at the helm of America's defenses. In the psychobabble beloved by the media, it was noted (which Inman had never denied) that Inman was always reluctant about taking the job, and that therefore these fantasies and this thin skin were really excuses for Inman's not taking the position.

Amidst all the stress on Bobby Ray's supposedly fragile psyche, it was overlooked that very little space was devoted to the content of the charges that Safire and the others were leveling against Bobby Ray; and virtually *no* space to Bobby Ray's explanation of the hostility that Safire and the others had long harbored against him, and which led to their anti-Inman campaign.

The media accounts all stress that no Senators were opposing the Inman nomination; but the Senate staffers were preparing detailed and thorough "scrutiny" of Inman's affairs. The media all imply that Inman was "paranoid" and engaging in fantasies. But if Bobby Ray, formerly Deputy Director of the CIA and head of the National Security Agency, is not equipped to distinguish between "paranoia" and genuine conspiracies, who is? Surely, "Mr. Intelligence" is better equipped for this task than reporters for the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*.

So let's stop the juvenile psychoanalyzing of Bobby Ray and cut to the content. The charges about to surface against Inman in the hearings included possible financial and even criminal peccadilloes in the private sector, centering around two companies. One was Inman's role as a member of the board of International Signal and Control, a firm found by a federal district judge to be a criminal enterprise engaged in illegal arms dealing, money laundering, and business fraud on a massive scale. The other firm was Tracor, Inc., an Austin, Texas military contractor of which Bobby Ray was chief executive, but not before Inman received nearly \$1 million in executive compensation. Then, of course, there was Inman's Nannygate, in which he hastily paid \$6,000 in back Social Security taxes for an aged part-time housekeeper only *after* he had been nominated for secretary of defense.

Furthermore, Bill Safire was not above ridiculing Inman's name in his widely influential column. Brushing aside the knowledge that a name like "Bobby Ray" is common in Texas and throughout the South, Safire ridiculed such a name for a grown man.

There was also a particularly ugly side to the media campaign against Inman. One of the points dredged up against Inman was that, while a high official in intelligence in 1980, he had acted to keep a gay in the National Security Agency from being fired from his post. Part of the anti-Inman tactic was a vicious whispering campaign to the effect that Inman himself, though married, is a secret gay. Before he dropped out, Inman told friends that no less than four reporters had called him up to ask him if he is gay.

Is it any wonder that Inman, who had left Washington because he hated the chronic back-stabbing, decided to Hell with it, and that, in fury, he decided to strike back at his tormentors instead of giving the usual bromides about "personal reasons" for withdrawal and making a quick exit from the scene?

It is fascinating, by the way, that so many of the Liberal media, always quick to attack "homophobia" and to proclaim that they are pro-gayer than thou, should not be above vicious gay-bashing against political figures they dislike. (The last time they pulled this stunt was against Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, after he won the Russian election, but of course the U.S. media are still a bit less powerful in Moscow than they are in Washington, D.C.)

Saluting "The Withdrawal of Admiral Inman," the *New York Times* (Jan. 20) crowed that "there was no politician or commentator so contrarian as to believe his [Inman's] improbable parting charge of a conspiracy" between Senator Dole and William Safire. Hey, not so fast, fella! You forgot to check with us at *Triple R*. Why not believe it? Stranger things have happened in Washington, and in recent weeks many neocons (e.g., at the *Wall Street Journal*) have been making noises about shifting their allegiance for 1996 from Jack Kemp to none other than Senator Dole, who of course is eagerly seeking media support. And Bill Safire is a powerful leader of the neocon forces. And, as we said above, who in the U.S. is in a position to know more about political conspiracies than Admiral Inman?

This is not to say that Inman's conspiracy charge is proven. What we need to find out the truth is an all out, tough congressional investigation, armed with subpoena power, to get to the bottom of the entire mess. None of the principals or their henchmen should be spared. Big Media has become an excessively powerful and malignant force in American political life; and it is high time that its machinations are exposed to public view.

The most fascinating, but oddly enough the least reported, aspect of the Inman Affair, is the source of the implacable hostility that Safire and his allies have borne for many years toward Bobby Ray Inman. Inman revealed the source in his famous January 18 press conference, but he failed to bring out the background. The source: In early 1981, Israel suddenly bombed Iraq's nuclear reactor. Puzzled, Inman, then deputy head of the CIA, realized that Israel could only have known where the nuclear reactor was located by having gotten access to U.S. satellite photographs. But Israel's access was *supposed* to be limited to

photographs of direct threats to Israel, which would not include Baghdad. On looking into the matter, furthermore, Inman found that Israel was habitually obtaining unwarranted access to photographs of regions even farther removed, including Libya and Pakistan. In the absence of Reagan's head of the CIA, Bill Casey, Inman ordered Israel's access to U.S. satellite photographs limited to 250 miles of its border. When Casey returned from a South Pacific trip, his favorite journalist and former campaign manager, Bill Safire, urged Casey to reverse the decision, a pressure that coincided with complaints from Israeli Defense Minister General Ariel Sharon, who had rushed to Washington to try to change the new policy.

Secretary of Defense Cap Weinberger, however held firm, supported Inman, and overruled Casey, and from then on Safire pursued a vendetta against Bobby Ray Inman.

This incident must be understood against its structural background: the CIA had long consisted of two clashing factions: the hard-line hawks, fanatical Cold Warriors, pro-Zionists and close to Israel's spy agency Mossad; and the moderates, close to the Establishment and the Rockefeller World Empire. The hard-liners and Mossadniks were big in the Operations department, and included Ops chief James Jesus Angleton, and Bill Buckley's CIA mentor and buddy E. Howard Hunt; they were headed by William J. Casey. The moderates were strong in the Intelligence department, and included William Colby and Admiral Inman.

Cut to the present, and the conspiracy charge by Inman against Safire and Company begins to make sense. For one point rarely mentioned in the media accounts is that Inman, in his press conference, did not only mention Safire and Senator Dole. He also mentioned, as part of the campaign against him, not only the editors of the *New York Times*, but three other media powers: *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis, *Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman, and *Washington Post* cartoonist Herblock (Herbert Block). On the face of it, a concerted campaign by these people against Inman would seem implausible; after all, Safire is a neocon, whereas the *New York Times*, Tony Lewis, Ellen Goodman, and Herblock are all notorious left-liberals. What could they all possibly have in common?

The answer is that they all have one important thing in common, one tie that binds. They are all ardent Zionists, and the source of the hostility to Inman at not being sufficiently pro-Israel now makes sense in underpinning the vendetta when Inman reluctantly agreed to Clinton's and Talbott's importuning to return in triumph to Washington.

In a fuller perspective, then, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman does not seem to be a paranoid nut after all. On the contrary, no one can blame him for saving himself and fleeing back to the warmer milieu of Austin,

Texas. It is no wonder that Bobby Ray feels more "comfortable" in Austin than in Washington, to use one of his favorite words. But it would have been far healthier for America, and for Americans' knowledge of the political forces at work in this country, if Bobby Ray had stood fast, and had forced a knock-down drag-out confrontation, in the course of which much of the truth might have come to the surface. As it is, it is inevitable that Safire & Company will be accorded near-legendary political influence from now on. In a town that worships Power, Bill Safire has now virtually attained the status of a Rajah.