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# Sen. Specter Holds Contra-Cocaine Hearings: CIA and Justice Investigate Themselves

By Katherine Hoyt

The Senate Intelligence Committee, chaired by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), has held two public hearings to investigate charges stemming from an August 18-20 series in the San Jose (CA) Mercury News. The series alleged that two Nicaraguans with connections to the CIA had provided cheap cocaine which helped start the crack epidemic in US inner cities in the early 1980s and sent at least some of the profits to the contras. The Nicaragua Network has attended both hearings.

On October 23, Senator Specter was joined by Senators Robert Kerrey (D-NE) and Charles Robb (D-VA) in asking questions of three witnesses. The first was Jack Blum, former counsel for the Kerry committee (John Kerry D-MA) which investigated CIA drug involvement in the 1980s. The senators then questioned the two inspectors general of the CIA and the Justice Department who are in charge of those agencies' internal investigations into charges of drug involvement and cover-up.

Blum testified that, based on the investigations of the Kerry committee into the CIA and contra drug-running, U.S. policy-makers "absolutely closed their eyes to drug dealing, thievery and human rights violations." He said that on the West Coast, the Justice Department returned confiscated drug money to the contras, adding that Blandon and Meneses sold cocaine so cheaply that it was below cost. In responding to the question of why the press gave so little coverage to the issue in the late 1980s, he said that there was a systematic effort on the part of the Justice Department to discredit the Kerry committee with the press.

The mainly African-American audience applauded when Blum stated that the U.S. government had made the decision to "sacrifice a certain part of our population to a foreign policy goal, and to look the other way." He added that the Kerry committee had evidence that the closest associates of contra leaders Adolfo Calero and Enrique Bermudez were involved in drug trafficking.

CIA Inspector General Frederick Hitz promised that he would carry out a thorough and objective investigation but did not believe that the process could be completed within the 60 days that he and his eleven-person staff have

been given. He also admitted that he did not have subpoena power.

Michael Bromivich, the Justice Department Inspector General, who was involved in the prosecution of Oliver North, stated that these investigations face deep cynicism from people in the communities affected by the drug epidemic. He stated that he needed more than the ten staff people whom he has been assigned and more than the 60 days allotted for the investigation. He also acknowledged that while he has the power to subpoena documents, he does not have the power to subpoena testimony.

The senators were concerned that the inspectors general were being asked to do something that it might be impossible for them to do.

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They asked the inspectors for interim reports as to how their work was progressing. Senator Specter said that the Intelligence Committee could carry out this investigation itself but has found it "very, very difficult" to get the executive branch to release documents.

On Nov. 26, Senator Specter held another session of the Intelligence Committee hearings. Again, a large audience of mainly African-American citizens had gathered, this time to hear the testimony of Adolfo Calero, former leader of the Honduras-based contras and Eden Pastora, a renegade Sandinista who formed a contra group based in Costa Rica.

At the beginning of the hearing, Specter, who was joined by Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), summarized the testimony heard behind closed doors the day before from Nicaraguan drug dealer Oscar Danilo Blandon, who figured prominently in the Mercury News series. In his testimony, Blandon denied involvement with the CIA and said that he had sent only about \$60,000 in drug profits to the contras, contradicting earlier sworn testimony when he stated

the amount as much larger.

Adolfo Calero, in his testimony, praised the CIA and denied any connection to drug dealing. There was an angry reaction when he declared, "I would say that all of this story — rather than about crack, is about crap." The crowd shouted "Cover-up! Cover-up!" One man stood and challenged the senators to call witnesses who would reveal more facts about the case. When security officers moved in to remove the man, as is usually done in Senate hearings, Sen. Specter told them to move away and let the man speak. He then invited Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), chair of the House Black Caucus, to join the Senators in asking questions of the witnesses. This was an unusual move which showed that the Senate is concerned about the African-American community's reaction to the issue of CIA involvement in the drug epidemic. Waters' questions were much more pointed and direct than those of the Senators.

In his testimony, Eden Pastora admitted to receiving gifts from Oscar Danilo Blandon and from a Colombian drug dealer, George Morales, but denied any knowledge at the time he received the gifts of the men's involvement with drugs.

On December 3, members of the staff of Congresswoman Waters attended a meeting of the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) to strategize with Working Group members. They explained the Congresswomen's use of "contra-cocaine" to talk about many important issues including the war on drugs and reform of the intelligence community. The LAWG and the Congresswoman's office will continue to work together on this issue. At the grassroots level, collaboration between the African-American community and the Central America solidarity community can happen with interchanges of information in local hearings or teach-ins or on talk radio shows. The Nicaragua Network plans to put together a packet of materials that will be useful for this work. Meanwhile, the demand of the Black Caucus at this time is for the naming of a special joint committee of the House and Senate to investigate the charges. This demand should be carried to the new leaders of both the House and the Senate.