
Abscam

The Weinberg death could boomerang

by Anita Gallagher

Abscam—the illegal “sting” operation of the U.S. Justice Department and FBI against Congressmen and Senators—has started to look like a live explosive that boomeranged into Justice’s front lobby. On the eve of expulsion proceedings against Sen. Harrison Williams of New Jersey, currently scheduled for Feb. 23 in the Senate, a series of legal motions made by Williams’s fellow Abscam victims ensures that the Justice Department must sacrifice some part of its elaborately constructed crime-creating apparatus. The only question is how much and how fast.

The new flurry of motions in the Abscam cases stems from revelations by the late Marie Weinberg, wife of the Abscam star witness Melvin Weinberg, showing that her husband had committed massive perjury in the case. Mrs. Weinberg had delivered her charges as sworn statements and also aired them on national television on ABC-TV’s “20-20” program Jan. 21. One week later, on Jan. 28, she was found hanged.

On Feb. 16, the Department of Justice must answer a motion by former Florida Congressman Richard Kelly convicted in the Abscam affair, to reopen the due-process portion of his trial based on Mrs. Weinberg’s sworn statements. The dead woman’s affidavits document extensive perjury, illegal gift-taking, and kickbacks by con man Weinberg while in the employ of the FBI—with the knowledge and complicity of FBI agents.

Observers note that the Justice Department has three options—ranging from the risky to the downright self-destructive. A great deal is at stake; the “sting” apparatus utilized against Senator Williams is expected to be turned immediately against President Reagan’s close allies and Reagan himself the minute Williams is expelled.

One option for the government is to stonewall—deny all of Marie Weinberg’s charges and attempt to portray her as emotionally unstable. But it is hard to believe that the court will stand for this, and the scandal could expand to the highest levels of the FBI and Justice.

A second option is to make Weinberg the fall guy. But with decades of experience in playing double games, Weinberg is known to have amassed the hard evidence to

turn these charges against higher-ups.

The FBI might also attempt a “damage control” approach, sacrificing Weinberg and some lower-level FBI agents like John Good and Anthony Amoroso (named by Marie Weinberg) by admitting they got out of hand in Abscam. The dilemma here is that any such admission implicates the highest levels of the Bureau and Justice: FBI Director William Webster repeatedly has claimed in congressional testimony that he had day-to-day, hour-by-hour control over the Abscam proceedings.

What Marie Weinberg said

Marie Weinberg before her death revealed Melvin Weinberg’s threats, in a 19-page statement quoted by nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson on Feb. 9. Marie Weinberg says her husband told her “If you talk to anyone, they’ll find about your past—your attempted suicide. They’ll make you out a crazy lady. They’ll take J. R. [their son] away from you.” Marie Weinberg wrote: “The blinders came off. I saw Mel as he really was. I am scared.”

Marie Weinberg also says that the FBI agents were party to the threats and were conducting surveillance of her. FBI Abscam agent John Good called her frequently and urged her to cooperate with the FBI after she had gone to Jack Anderson with proof of FBI conspiracy to conceal Weinberg’s perjury. Good himself proposed to visit her in Florida, she says: “Suppose I come down next week, Monday, 1-11-82. *I have to get clearance from Washington.*” Good did come, presumably with clearance, and she writes that when she refused to see him: “J. R. said that right after I left cars were riding around condo—strange men—saw neighbor next morning—agents all over—watching.”

Good was frantic to see Marie Weinberg on Jan. 11, because on Jan. 6 the Justice Department was forced to begin an official investigation of Marie Weinberg’s allegations that her husband perjured himself and that FBI agents had covered up his perjury.

It is clear that Mel Weinberg has in his possession evidence of all types of FBI criminal activity. Anderson on Feb. 10 quotes Marie Weinberg’s statement that Mel Weinberg recorded “the agents’ compromising conversations.” “He was taping all the agents,” says Marie Weinberg, “He says . . . I’ll get insurance.”

If the FBI has a Hobson’s choice of who can be blamed for Abscam’s misconduct, what about the death of Marie Weinberg? If Marie Weinberg’s death is ruled a suicide, her affidavits are certified in effect as deathbed testimony, for which she would have no motive to lie. If her death is ruled murder, then by whom? If the FBI tries to pin the rap on Weinberg, he can implicate the FBI agents up to the top. The FBI refused to give Marie Weinberg protection after her revelations, and refused to investigate her death.