

The Larry Speakes scandal hurts the palace guard

by Stanley Ezrol in Washington, D.C.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes created an international scandal the week of Feb. 20 over the issue of Treasury Secretary Donald Regan's denial of Secret Service protection for presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche. Speakes's treatment of Laura Chasen Cohen, a journalist for this news-weekly, which was founded by LaRouche, made the Secret Service question into an issue which threatens to devastate the dirty "palace guard" at the White House. That palace guard is the James Baker III-Michael Deaver-Robert MacFarlane operation which kept Reagan in the dark on the strategic and economic crises through which their controller Henry Kissinger plans to derail the Reagan presidency.

On the evening of Feb. 22, President Reagan held a nationally televised press conference. The event proceeded in routine fashion. Only reporters assigned special seating in the front rows of the White House East Room were recognized by the President. After precisely 30 minutes, as is usual, the press conference was ended. Reagan stepped from the podium as he always does after an East Room press conference and walked to his right, accompanied by Secret Service agents, down an aisle between rows of reporters. As usual, the reporters crowded to the aisle, and some of them shouted out questions or greetings to the President. Among them was Chasen, a regular attendee of both presidential press conferences and Speakes's daily White House press briefings. She, like the other reporters in the room, had been checked and cleared by the Secret Service after a thorough investigation confirmed that she represented no physical threat to the President or others.

She yelled out to the President, "Mr. President, are you aware that Donald Regan has denied Secret Service protection to Lyndon LaRouche?" He looked puzzled at that point, possibly because he did not hear the whole question—he is hard of hearing and many other reporters were shouting questions as well. Chasen repeated, "Do you know that LaRouche has been denied Secret Service protection—that Regan denied it?" The President stopped as if to respond.

At that point, the routine was broken as Speakes, for reasons he has yet to explain, launched into a fit of rage which has shocked Washington. Speakes yelled to the Secret Service agents, "Get her away! Get her away!" An agent grabbed Chasen and ordered her, "Don't go any further!" The Presi-

dent was hustled out of the room. As soon as the Secret Service agents realized that Chasen represented no security threat and that the only problem was the response provoked by Speakes's outburst, she proceeded to leave the White House compound, after discussing the incident with several other reporters.

Minutes later, Speakes ordered loudspeaker announcements made throughout the White House press wing ordering Chasen to report to his office. When she did not respond, the apoplectic Speakes ordered his staff to search the White House compound for her, despite their protests that she had no doubt left for home. In the following days, the incident hit the press and wire services around the country.

After Chasen refused Speakes's demand that she report to his office, presumably for a dressing down, the matter seemed to have been dropped until Feb. 28. At that point, Chasen, responding to Speakes' written request to her that she ask him any questions which were left unanswered by the President, asked him the same question she had asked the President.

Speakes cut her off, demanding, "No, let me ask a question." He proceeded to grill Chasen: "How would you describe your news-gathering organization and who it represents and what its purposes are and who its circulation is? [sic]" This astounding performance provoked ABC-TV's Sam Donaldson to ask Speakes, "Why is it germane for you to ask reporters here who have access, I suppose through accreditations, these questions?"

The latest attempt by Speakes to put a rational face on this matter is a written response to Chasen which he had one of his staff present to her on March 2. In this response, Speakes in effect confesses that he and the White House palace guard concealed the decision on Secret Service protection from the President, but tried to justify this deceit by the unconstitutional argument that authority in the matter rests with the Treasury Secretary and his advisory committee.

First, to the question, "When [was] President Reagan . . . first informed that LaRouche had been denied Secret Service protection?" Speakes responded: "The decision to deny Secret Service protection to Mr. LaRouche was made by Secretary of the Treasury Regan, on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Presidential Protection. The Committee concluded that Mr. LaRouche is not a serious candidate for national office. The Committee is comprised of Speaker O'Neill, Senator Robert Byrd, Senator Howard Baker, Congressman Bob Michel and one public member, William Rogers.

"These decision [sic] are left to Secretary Regan and the Committee. There is no official notification to the White House or the President concerning who is granted or not granted Secret Service protection during the campaign." To Chasen's question as to whether Regan had been told that LaRouche is on the official hit list of Muammar Qaddafi, Speakes answered, "No."