
Interview: Mark Swaney

Citizen's group investigates Clinton role in Mena coverup

Mark Swaney is a postgraduate student in engineering at the main campus of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. In 1989, he spearheaded the founding of a civic group called the Arkansas Committee, which has campaigned ever since to have the Mena scandal investigated. Swaney has personally visited Mena and assisted in several news agency investigations of the scandal. Swaney spoke with EIR's Jeffrey Steinberg on April 13.

EIR: Can you give our readers a brief history of the Arkansas Committee?

Swaney: We held our first meeting in October 1989. I founded the group along with some folks who agreed with me that it was very upsetting that the Democrats had made no effort during the 1988 presidential elections to really get to the bottom of the Iran-Contra scandal. We wanted to force some of these issues to the surface, instigate debate, and hopefully cause some genuine reforms in our political system. I decided I couldn't just sit back and watch the TV. I feared that things would get worse under President Bush, that we were drifting towards a crypto-fascist system in the United States.

I went to Washington during the week of Bush's inauguration in early 1989. I spoke with some people there. I returned to Arkansas and enrolled in graduate school. The committee was set up at first as a university-based student group. Although we initially conceived of ourselves as a multi-issue group, by May 1991, we were focusing all of our efforts on getting to the bottom of the Mena scandal. We held a big demonstration when Ollie North came to speak in Arkansas. We were making headway in turning up new evidence. Our idea was to keep the scandal alive via demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns and petitions. When Governor Clinton declared his candidacy for President, we saw this as our last best chance to force the story to break outside of the state.

EIR: What about Bill Clinton's involvement with Mena?

Swaney: At the very least, he knew all along about Mena. It is possible, even highly probable, based on a mountain of circumstantial evidence, that he was directly involved.

It is important to realize that the activities at Mena, the illegal covert activities, predated Bill Clinton's election as governor. They predate Iran-Contra. Back in the 1970s, the

Mena airport was being used to train guerrillas who were being sent into Africa and other locations. This goes back to George Bush's tenure as CIA director. I should add that this situation is still ongoing. Last week, a deputy sheriff told us that 19 bricks of heroin had been recently moved through there. As of last December, C-130 cargo planes were still flying in and out of Mena.

The way I believe that the Mena business worked, as far as Bill Clinton goes, is that when he came in as governor, he was told: "By the way, there are national security operations being carried out in the Mena area, so please don't mess around with them." These were national security activities—illegal activities—involving American intelligence agencies. They would worry that federal and state law enforcement agencies might interfere. They would deal with that problem top down. It was necessary to have the top man on your side—in this case, the governor. In the 1980s, gubernatorial elections were taking place every two years. It would have been quite an inconvenience to have to re-do the deal every two years, so I believe a lot of money was funneled into Clinton's campaigns, once he made it clear that he would play ball, to see to it that he was reelected.

Any time along the way, but especially after 1987, Bill Clinton could have unleashed the state police and gotten to the bottom of the entire filthy scandal around Mena, drugs, Contra training, etc. He never did; and I have the gut feeling that this is why he was built up through the Democratic Leadership Council, and why he has been being groomed for a presidential run since 1988.

From the standpoint of the corrupt elements in the intelligence establishment, if you can pay off both candidates running for the White House, then you don't have to worry about who's elected.

There are other things about Clinton that also tie him into the most corrupt elements of the intelligence community. The Wackenhut Corporation has been involved in the Mena business—prominently. Stephens, Inc. is one very important link. Stephens, Inc. [a Little Rock investment firm] is implicated very deeply, at a very high level in the BCCI [Bank of Credit and Commerce International] scandal. They are the biggest supporters of Clinton. They funneled the most cash into Clinton's career, especially since 1988.

EIR: One of the reasons that the Mena scandal is attracting

so much attention today is because it suggests that Bill Clinton and George Bush are in bed together on at least these dirty goings-on in Arkansas. Are there some local angles on this worth mentioning?

Swaney: Remember that Mena is in the middle of the congressional district that has been held by John Paul Hammerschmidt for a long time. Hammerschmidt and George Bush go back a long time, to Bush's time in the U.S. Congress. Hammerschmidt was already a seasoned Republican congressman back in the mid-1960s when George Bush was first elected. Hammerschmidt took Bush under his wings and they have been close friends ever since. Hammerschmidt

ran Bush's 1988 campaign in Arkansas. Both Clinton and Hammerschmidt have been instrumental in blocking any official efforts to get to the bottom of the scandal.

You can take it from there. I'd just like to add, however, that our perspective at the Arkansas Committee is that we are less concerned about the 1992 presidential election than we are about seeing to it that the people of this country are told the truth about Mena and about every other similar dirty scandal involving our government agencies and our elected politicians.

Until all the dirty laundry is aired, meaningful reforms will be impossible.

Mena and the media

As we go to press, the April 20 issue of *Time* magazine arrived at the newsstands, featuring a preemptive attack against Terry Reed, labeling him a liar and a con artist. The *Time* story was written by Richard Behar and dated Little Rock.

An article in the *Village Voice* of April 14 was only somewhat kinder to Reed, citing an investigator who has tracked the Arkansas scandal since 1987 and says Reed was "totally ignorant of the Mena situation" when they met in 1989. The *Voice* article was penned by Frank Snapp, a former CIA officer who has been recently reincarnated as an investigative reporter. Early this year, Snapp wrote a lengthy article for the *Village Voice* which, under the guise of exposing Richard Brenneke as a source of disinformation on the October Surprise scandal, sought to dismiss the entire allegation of Republican Party interference in the 1980 hostage negotiations with Iran as fabrication. In fairness to Snapp, his *Voice* article did spell out the Barry Seal drug-running and Contra-training project in Mena, and did put some heat on Clinton to own up to his lack of enthusiasm for exposing the scandal in his backyard and his efforts to lie his way out of that coverup.

One gets a strong sense of *déjà vu* about the media mobilization to trash Terry Reed. Beginning last November, when Congress was about to reach a decision on funding a serious probe of October Surprise, *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* ran cover stories aimed at burying the allegations before they could ever be seriously probed by the proper, unbiased authorities.

In attempting to discredit Reed, *Time's* Richard Behar did such a slipshod job, that even the *Washington Post* had to chide him for getting his facts all screwed up—which may have more to do with a brutal circulation war between *Time* and its leading competitor *Newsweek*, which is owned by the *Post*.

As in the case of October Surprise, some media outlets have gone forward with stories about Mena, including the Reed allegations. Beginning in February, the *Nation* ran a series of five articles by Alexander Cockburn, presenting a potpourri of evidence implicating Clinton and his friends in the Mena scandal. The *Nation* stories highlighted the Terry Reed case, prompting Behar to blast Cockburn as a "credulous journalist" who publishes "absurdly speculative accounts" of the Arkansas guns for drugs operation.

And on April 13, Geraldo Rivera's "Now It Can Be Told," television magazine, aired the first of a three-part series on Mena dubbed "Crimes of the Patriots." Though Terry Reed was not mentioned by name in the syndicated program, pages from the Reed Florida deposition were shown on the screen and the role of Bill Clinton in covering up a scandal implicating George Bush was highlighted.

Marilyn Trubey, Terry Reed's Federal Public Defender in the Wichita criminal case, to this day swears by her client's account of the events and swears by his innocence. Trubey, who describes herself as "not at all naive," conducted her own extensive investigation into all of Reed's claims in preparation for the trial. She says that she corroborated all the essential details.

That corroborating evidence never saw the light of day, as the government went into a panic once Reed filed a Classified Information Procedures Act (CIPA) notice in June 1990. In that notice, Reed announced that his defense would touch upon government secrets involving Oliver North, Felix Rodriguez, Barry Seal, Buddy Young, Southern Air Transport, etc. Trubey does not know whether the government ever submitted classified documents to Judge Theis for his *in camera* review. She asserts that from the moment the CIPA notice was filed, the federal government lost all interest in proceeding with the Reed prosecution. Reed was fully acquitted on Nov. 9, 1990.

Item. Trubey was contacted by Behar. She told him more or less the same thing she told *EIR*. For some mysterious reason, her remarks never made it into the pages of *Time*.