

## Bad Omens for Cheney

In a development which is dramatically bad news for Dick Cheney, Attorney General John Ashcroft disqualified himself from any role in the Justice Department's investigation into the illegal disclosure of the identity of CIA undercover officer Valerie Plame. Ashcroft had refused this step for months, despite calls on him from a number of Congressman—including Rep. John Conyers, the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee—to recuse himself and appoint a special counsel to conduct the investigation, because of Ashcroft's close political ties to the White House; Karl Rove had previously worked as a political adviser in Ashcroft's election campaigns. On Dec. 22, Senators Tom Daschle and Carl Levin had sent Ashcroft a letter demanding more information about the probe, and asking Ashcroft to recuse himself and appoint a special counsel.

The recusal decision was announced in a Dec. 30 press conference by Deputy Attorney General James Comey. Comey stated that he, as a result of Ashcroft's recusal, was functioning as the Acting U.S. Attorney General, and that he had appointed Patrick J. Fitzgerald as special counsel, with complete independent power and authority to conduct the leak investigation. Fitzgerald is, by all accounts, a hard-driving, hard-nosed career prosecutor, who was appointed to be the U.S. Attorney in Chicago in 2001, after having worked in the Southern District of New York (Manhattan) since 1988, prosecuting organized crime, drug-trafficking, and terrorism cases.

Comey said that he had recommended Ashcroft recuse himself, and that Ashcroft had come to the same conclusion over the past week, based upon the "facts that have been developed" in the investigation to date. The implica-

tion in Comey's comments, was that something big had come up in the investigation, which required Ashcroft to disqualify himself. "What I can tell you is that the investigation has been moving along very, very quickly; has been worked very, very hard and very, very well," Comey stated, "and it reached a point where we simply thought these judgments were appropriate."

Well-placed sources told *EIR* that what triggered these momentous events was a significant break in the leak investigation, and that the trail leads directly into the Office of the Vice President—more particularly to John Hannah, the deputy director of Cheney's national security staff, who works directly under Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Richard Perle's name has also come up in connection with the leak probe, a source stated.

To add to Cheney's troubles, on Dec. 20 a French magistrate notified that country's Ministry of Justice that the U.S. Vice-President could face indictment in connection with a corruption investigation involving Halliburton. The investigation, into charges of bribery and misuse of corporate assets, involves the bidding for construction of a \$6 billion gas liquification factory in Nigeria, built for Shell oil company by Halliburton's KBR subsidiary, partnered with the French oil services company Technip.

French magistrate Renaud van Ruymbeke is examining \$180 million in secret commissions, which he believes were actually bribes paid to Nigerian officials and others. Ruymbeke is focussing on the ~~x~~bagman~~x~~ in the operation, London lawyer Jeffrey Tesler, who set up a company in Gibraltar through which the "commissions" were routed. Tessler has had a close relationship to Halliburton for 30 years.

Sources tell *EIR* that Cheney's own signature is to be found on some of the documents pertaining to the secret "commissions."—*Edward Spannaus*