

When Politicians Support Terrorism

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

At least a dozen current senators and representatives have long records of backing terrorist groups, but their critics remain silent out of a fear of being labeled racist.

When he was governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge signed the execution warrant for Muslim militant Mumia Abu-Jamal, whom a jury convicted of murdering Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner in 1981. Mumia had shot the 25-year-old policeman once in the back and point-blank in the face. A handful of congressmen, as part of a yearslong campaign to "Free Mumia," assailed Ridge.

Those same congressmen likely will give Ridge an even harder time in his new post as secretary of homeland security. The most senior of them, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), has been on the Mumia campaign since the start, signing letters, addressing rallies and pressur-

Rogues' gallery: Among the influential lawmakers who have records of supporting terrorist groups or regimes that sponsor terrorism are, from left, Barbara Mikulski, Luis Gutierrez, John Conyers, Tom Harkin, President Bill Clinton, Barbara Lee, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Ronald V. Dellums.

ing the previous president of the United States to intervene. Conyers similarly has embraced the cause of Leonard Peltier, the convicted murderer of FBI special agents Jack R. Coler and Ronald A. Williams. Conyers argues that Mumia, a Muslim African-American, and Peltier, an American Indian, are victims of a racist and bigoted system. He also sued the Department of Justice a year ago to force an open hearing for Rabih Haddad, leader of a group that U.S. officials say raises money in the United States for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist group.

Fringe politician that he is, Conyers is no backbencher. On his Website he calls himself "a senior statesman in American political life." The 20-term representative from Detroit is the second-most-senior member of the House, and serves as the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee. This means he shares oversight of the Justice Department and FBI, and writes and amends antiterrorism laws. Nor is he alone as a prominent congressional friend of radicals and revolutionaries.

An *INSIGHT* investigation finds that at

least a dozen sitting members of the House and Senate have provided active support to terrorist organizations, armed clandestine groups that targeted and killed Americans, or regimes that sponsor terrorism. Some of the lawmakers have been at it for years—even decades. Some appear to have done it for ideological reasons. Others certainly have been duped. With most, it's hard to tell.

The problem, close observers of domestic terrorist groups say, is that providing such support has become an accepted practice on Capitol Hill, where critics are silent and almost everyone would like to sweep the issue under the rug. One of the reasons for the silence, congressional sources admit, is that either the lawmakers or the cop-killers and terrorists for whom they advocate are members of ethnic minorities—and Democrats and Republicans alike are afraid to raise the issue for fear of being called racist.

At the time Mumia murdered Faulkner, Barbara Lee was on Capitol Hill as a staffer to then-representative Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.). She succeeded Dellums in a special 1998 election and sits on the House International Relations Committee.

Like Conyers, Rep. Lee publicly has embraced the "Free Mumia" campaign, and she has long-standing ties to radical groups and to regimes that have sponsored terrorism. In the early 1980s, Lee had an unusually close relationship with the Marxist-Leninist regime of Maurice Bishop on the Caribbean island of Grenada. Lee and fellow Dellums staffer Carlotta Scott had tried with much frustration to get the congressman involved with the Grenada cause, and finally, in April 1982, brought him to the island where he became committed to the Bishop regime. At that time, Grenada was serving as a transshipment point for Soviet-bloc weaponry to guerrilla and terrorist organizations in the hemisphere, as official documents captured by U.S. forces subsequently proved.

One of those documents is a May 16, 1980, memorandum from the Grenadian



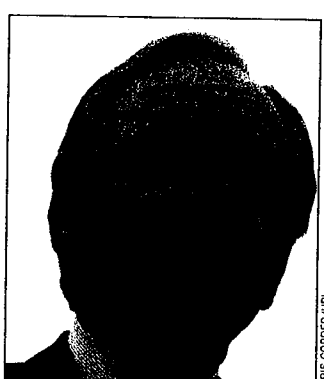
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ambassador to the Organization of American States to Bishop, stating that Lee warned of a possible infiltration of the regime's leadership. Lee had received a letter, addressed to her Capitol Hill office in 2464 Rayburn Building, from the office of the prime minister and with an official postal frank. The memorandum stated, "Comrade: On May 14, 1980, Barbara Lee called to say she had received a piece of anti-PRG [People's Revolutionary Government] propaganda stamped from the prime minister's office, postmarked in Grenada. We collected it May 15, and it is herewith attached." The ambassador suspected "a spy inside the ministry" and credited Lee for the timely warning to the communist regime.

Lee and Scott pushed the PRG cause for some time, finally persuading Dellums to visit Grenada in early 1982. *INSIGHT* has obtained a letter that Scott wrote to Bishop after that visit, following a stop in Cuba. Addressing the Grenadian leader as "My Dearest," she described ideas that she, Lee and Dellums had for promoting the Marxist-Leninist regime's cause in Washington. "Ron had a long talk with Barb and me when we got to Havana and cried when he realized that we had been shouldering Grenada alone all this time," she wrote. "He's really hooked on you and Grenada and doesn't want anything to happen to building the Revo[lution] and making it strong. He really admires you as a person and even more so as a leader with courage and foresight, principle and integrity. Believe me, he doesn't make that kind of statement often about anyone. The only other person that I know of that he expresses such admiration for is Fidel [Castro]."

Several other such U.S. lawmakers have championed a domestic terrorist group, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (known by its Spanish initials of FALN) that seeks to impose a Marxist-Leninist regime on Puerto Rico and secede from the United States. In the 1970s and 1980s, the FALN planted more than 130 bombs and killed at least six people. Reps. José E. Serrano (D-N.Y.),



Misguided march: Thousands walked through Philadelphia in 1999 in protest of Abu-Jamal's imprisonment.

Nydia M. Velázquez (D-N.Y.) and Luis V. Gutierrez (D-Ill.), all left-wingers of Puerto Rican ancestry, embraced the cause of 16 convicted FALN members serving time in federal prison. Serrano called them "political prisoners," according to the *People's Weekly World*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party USA.

They campaigned to pressure then-president Bill Clinton to issue pardons to free the radicals, even though the terrorists themselves had not requested that their sentences be commuted. When Clinton agreed to grant them clemency in August 1999, Serrano blasted him for requiring them to renounce violence as a precondition of their release.

That presidential action caused problems for then-first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who was about to begin her campaign to become a U.S. senator. "President Clinton made his decision to release the FALN terrorists at the same time his wife was campaigning for the Senate in New York," the Senate Republican Policy Committee reported in a policy paper. "Many commentators believe he hoped to win votes for his wife from the large Hispanic population in New York City.

However, law-enforcement groups and victims'-rights groups were outraged, and his clemency offer did not poll well in New York state. His wife then opposed the granting of clemency, and the president denied that she was in any way involved in the decision."

The clemency offer did not otherwise fit the pattern of Clinton's behavior, the committee noted: "The president had only granted three out of the more than 4,000 clemency requests during his presidency." The terrorists didn't even ask for clemency, and in granting it Clinton "did not follow the procedures that have been in place since Grover Cleveland was president," granting it "even though the Justice Department did not take an official position as required."

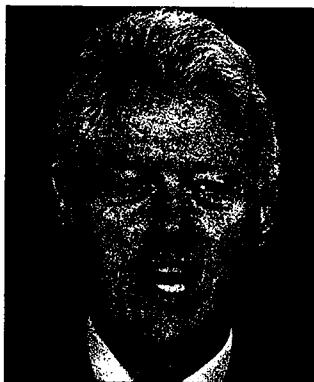
Ninety-five senators condemned Clinton's action, voting in a resolution that "the president's offer of clemency to the FALN terrorists violates long-standing tenets of United States counterterrorism policy, and the release of terrorists is an affront to the rule of law, the victims and their families, and every American who believes that violent acts must be punished to the fullest extent of the law."

A joint congressional resolution declared that "making concessions to terrorists is deplorable," and that "President Clinton should not have granted amnesty to the FALN terrorists."

Hillary Clinton changed her position, but not two of her colleagues-to-be. Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) and the late Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) were the minority of two standing on the far left with the amnesty.

Several lawmakers even have rallied to the causes of American terrorists and terrorist collaborators arrested and imprisoned abroad. Lori Berenson, a member of the Marxist-Leninist Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Peru, was convicted and imprisoned in harsh conditions under the country's strict antiterrorist laws. Her congress-

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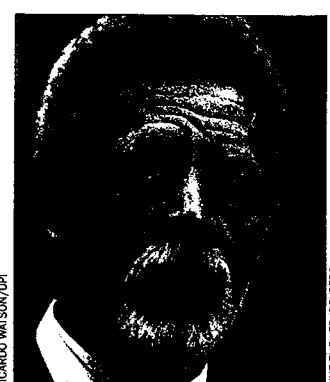
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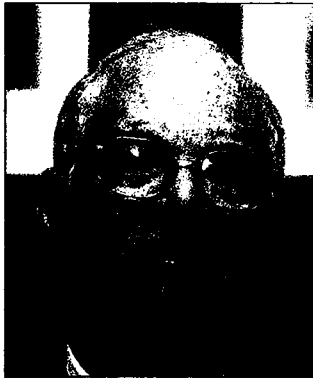
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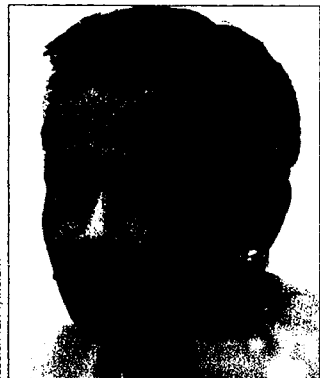
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Whose side are they on? Whether for ideological reasons or simply because they were duped, a handful of elected officials in the Senate and the House are known to have supplied backing to terrorist elements. These include (clockwise from top left) Benjamin Cardin, Carolyn Maloney, José Serrano, Nydia Velázquez, Jim McGovern, Christopher Dodd and Nancy Pelosi.

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woman from home, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), has interceded on her behalf; so have Reps. Jim Leach (R-Iowa) and Jim McGovern (D-Mass.). McGovern has allied himself with violent revolutionary movements since the 1980s, when he was a staffer for the late Rep. Joseph Moakley (D-Mass.). He has helped the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, facilitating the shipment of material aid and American volunteers for the Cuban-backed group's rural civic-action efforts, according to documents and letters he signed in the 1980s that *INSIGHT* has obtained.

Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) secured the release in the 1980s of Jennifer Jean Casolo, an operative with the FMLN, after Salvadoran authorities found her house in San Salvador had been a clandestine arsenal.

El Salvador was a breeding ground of sorts for witting and unwitting congressional support for foreign extremist groups that targeted American military and civilian personnel and U.S. interests. The country's bitter guerrilla war in the 1980s attracted a score or more of U.S. lawmakers to assist FMLN propaganda, civic-action and fund-raising operations. Most of the congressmen seemed otherwise ignorant of El Salvador and unaware that the groups they were supporting were FMLN

fronts. But some, including Conyers, signed direct-mail fund-raising letters to raise money for FMLN fronts — in Conyers' case, a group called Medical Aid to El Salvador, which channeled medicine and first-aid supplies to FMLN-controlled groups and regions. *INSIGHT* has a copy of the Conyers letter, which the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador at the time, Edwin Corr, assailed in a long cable as being full of FMLN disinformation about the nature of the conflict and of U.S. involvement.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), now House minority leader and the most powerful woman in Congress, signed many letters on behalf of FMLN causes in the 1980s. Among the letters, copies of which *INSIGHT* obtained, are requests to the U.S. Embassy and to the Salvadoran military and civilian leadership urging them to grant safe-conduct passes to radical American activists into FMLN-controlled regions. A former Salvadoran ambassador to the United States tells *INSIGHT* that his government felt intense pressure to grant the passes demanded by U.S. lawmakers, even though authorities knew the activists were with FMLN support groups and that their activities provided material support to the communist guerrilla forces and their civilian infrastructure.

Other sitting lawmakers who publicly endorsed, assisted or lent their names to FMLN causes include Sens. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), and Rep. Benjamin Cardin (D-

Md.), according to literature published by FMLN support groups such as the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.

The FMLN assassinated American military trainers, U.S. Marines who guarded the embassy in San Salvador, American businessmen and CIA assets, and a retired American Jesuit priest, the Rev. Francisco Peccorini.

Most of these lawmakers object when they are charged with helping extremists, terrorist groups or terrorist regimes and, indeed, most probably have no idea they did so. But some are hard-core extremists who know very well what they have been doing. Serrano, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations panel in control of the FBI budget, is one of the latter.

MSNBC's Chris Matthews once grilled Serrano about Castro and Cuba, asking the lawmaker if he thought Cuba, one of seven countries the State Department classifies as a state sponsor of terrorism, is a free country. "It's a sovereign country," Serrano said at first, then added, "It's a country with a system different from ours." After aggressive prodding from Matthews, Serrano said, "I don't know if it's a free country. I don't live there." Ultimately the congressman revealed his true belief. The Castro regime, he said, "allows personal freedoms — absolutely."

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