

US government retreats before rightists in Elian Gonzalez case

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The events of Thursday, April 13 in the Elian Gonzalez case show the cowardice of the Clinton administration in the face of opposition from the cabal of right-wingers and outright fascists who are openly defying the law and refusing to hand over the six-year-old boy to his Cuban father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez.

After a two and a half hour meeting Wednesday night with Elian's distant Miami relatives, who have held the boy for more than four months, defying a series of INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) and court orders, Attorney General Janet Reno made a humiliating retreat to Washington. At noon Thursday, two hours before the 2 p.m. deadline which had been announced with great fanfare by the Justice Department and the INS, Reno said that there would be no attempt that day to take Elian from the home of his great-uncle, Lazaro Gonzalez.

More than a thousand Cuban exiles and right-wingers, who had surrounded the house in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood, cheered their successful defiance of the law. "We will not turn this child over," Lazaro Gonzalez declared. "They will have to take this child from me by force."

On Thursday morning the Miami relatives released to the press a brief home videotape in which the six-year-old boy tells his father that he does not want to go back to Cuba. The making of this videotape, now disseminated worldwide, is itself evidence, if more were needed, that these crazed fascist elements care nothing for the well-being of Elian Gonzalez. The young boy is being cruelly manipulated for political purposes, an action which fully deserves the label "child abuse."

Gregory Craig, the attorney for Juan Miguel Gonzalez, said the Miami relatives had, with their actions Thursday, "emotionally damaged and exploited

this most wonderful little boy." He urged the news media to leave the boy alone because he "has been exploited enough."

Juan Miguel Gonzalez—whose conduct has been the only thing dignified and even ennobling in this affair—expressed anger and sadness over the latest turn of events. He told the *New York Daily News* in an interview: "Elian is very smart, very studious and I'm very proud of him. I want him to be whatever he wants to be when he grows up. I just want him to be able to change the world somehow."

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Elian belongs with his father and that he is the victim of a virtual kidnapping by politically motivated right-wingers, the Clinton administration has been incapable of enforcing the democratic right of the father to take custody of his son and return with him to the country of his choice, Cuba.

Clinton issued his first direct comments on the case Thursday, supporting Reno's decision not to order federal agents into Little Havana to remove Elian from the home of Lazaro Gonzalez. "I've tried to do everything I can to stay out of it," he said in Washington, where he spoke before the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Shortly after this display of impotence and political prostration, the federal judiciary intervened on the side of the Miami rightists. The 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta issued a temporary stay barring any federal action to remove Elian from the territory of the United States. While the order does not specifically bar action which transfers Elian from Miami to the custody of his father on US soil, federal officials have agreed privately that they will not take such action during the next "three or four days," while the case is argued before the appeals panel.

The Clinton administration's tenderness towards the Miami fascists is in sharp contrast to its overall record on civil rights and civil liberties. This is a government which has funded a record buildup of police and prisons nationwide and has cracked down ruthlessly on alleged "terrorists", so long as they were immigrants from the Middle East and not anticommunist refugees.

It is worth pointing out that during the same time that Clinton and Reno are kowtowing before the Cuban-American anticommunists, the federal government is mobilizing thousands of police, FBI agents and federal marshals to attack protesters in Washington DC who have gathered to demonstrate and carry out civil disobedience at the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF.

And, of course, no one can forget that Janet Reno's first decision as Attorney General was to authorize the assault which led to the incineration of 80 people in the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Ironically, Reno claimed at the time that her order to go ahead with the assault was prompted by reports of child abuse on the part of the Branch Davidians.

In Miami, however, Reno has proceeded in the opposite fashion. Open defiance of the law and flagrant exploitation of a child are met with more concessions, more deadlines abandoned, more conciliatory statements. This conduct has a political explanation. Both the Clinton administration and the Republican-led Congress have encouraged the right-wing anticommunist elements in Miami and have granted them immense influence.

Earlier in the week, published opinion polls showed massive opposition among the American people to the position of the Miami relatives, and general support for the efforts of Juan Miguel Gonzalez to reclaim his son. There were reports of demoralization among the right-wing forces in Miami and a dwindling turnout of protesters at the home of Lazaro Gonzalez. But the actions of Clinton and Reno and the intervention of the courts has re-emboldened the extreme right.

The Clinton administration is terrified of a direct confrontation with these ultra-right forces, not merely because of the electoral concerns of Vice President Al Gore, but because these elements enjoy considerable support within the capitalist state itself, where the CIA, FBI and Pentagon have all forged close ties with them on the basis of rabid anticommunism. Similar ties exist

within both political parties.

These events demonstrate that the defense of democratic rights cannot be left in the hands of the federal government. It is virtually prostrate before fascists who conduct themselves in Miami as though they constituted an independent and sovereign state, defying not only court orders and the law, but public opinion, which overwhelmingly favors return of Elian to his father.



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