

Correspondence about Pan Am 103/Lockerbie

28 November 2000

Dear WSWs

I think you should be aware that the video conference scheduled for relatives at the remote TV sites concerning the Lockerbie trial was not a matter of "angry relatives" being offered an explanation by the Lord Advocate. You make it sound like some extraordinary event where he was supposed to justify himself. This was not the approach taken — and in any case, the Lord Advocate was on his way to Scotland for Donald Dewar's funeral. The video conference was an attempt to offer the same facility, of being able to ask questions of the prosecution team, to all relatives who do not go to Camp Zeist. It is a pity that this sort of false, sensational stuff creeps into what was otherwise an interesting account of the situation. You may also wish to know, if you don't already, that the British relatives had pressed for some years for the trial to be held in a neutral venue. The fact that this happened depended not only on Nelson Mandela, but also on the change of government in the UK. Without the latter, it would never have taken place.

I am making no comment on the progress of the trial and what I think of it. But it is too irritating, when you know what is truly happening, to let idle comments that have no foundation pass.

I hope you will find my comments helpful.

Pamela Dix

(Sister of Peter Dix, killed on Pan Am 103)

Steve James responds for the *World Socialist Web Site*

Dear Pamela

Thank you very much for your e-mail clarifying the approach taken by relatives to the prosecution's explanatory video linked meeting. I am happy to stand corrected and apologise for any upset that this has caused. There is always a danger when attempting to summarise issues around Lockerbie of being led astray by sensationalism or silence from the media and the numerous other parties with their own axes to grind.

At the same time, my understanding of the briefings that have been organised by the prosecution is that they are indeed extraordinary. Robert Black, the Lockerbie lawyer who worked for the Camp Zeist trial to be held under Scottish law, notes on his site, "there is growing evidence that these sessions are a blatant attempt by the Crown to

ensure that any developments at the trial which may be perceived as a 'difficulty' in the Crown case are downplayed." Prosecutor Norman Macfadyen's comments that the present interruptions over new alleged information from Syria are merely a "hiccup" would seem to confirm this analysis. In addition, they come immediately after the evidence from Giacka, the Libyan spy and alleged eyewitness, had proved so disastrous for the prosecution.

The very fact that the briefings had to take place backs up your other point regarding the role of the relatives, not only in calling for a neutral venue but also as the most consistent advocates of the truth being revealed. I think this is one of the most important, and as yet largely unacknowledged aspects of the trial, and will have a considerable bearing on whatever follows its conclusion.

Regarding the role of the Labour government in the UK, I agree that Labour's election was one of several factors that contributed to the present trial. In an introductory article, on May 6 2000 ("Pan Am Flight 103: Trial opens of Libyans accused of Lockerbie bombing" <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/may2000/lock-m06.shtml>) we attempted to put the trial in a broader political context.

We wrote: "For years it was assumed that no legal proceedings into the Lockerbie tragedy would ever be held, as Libya would be unlikely to give up the accused individuals. That the case has come to court is the outcome of a significant shift in political and economic relations internationally. The European Union (EU) has led efforts to normalise relations with Libya in order to gain access to the country's considerable oil resources.

"The accession of Blair's Labour government to office in 1997 provided a means for Britain—concerned that French and Italian oil companies were reaping the benefits of the USA-UK embargo on Libya—to develop its interests in the country. After protracted negotiations with South Africa's Nelson Mandela and UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, Libyan leader Colonel Gadhafi agreed to hand over Al-Megrahi and Fhimah last year—provided they would not be tried on US or British soil. They have been held in the Netherlands ever since."

"Once the suspects were handed over, the EU lifted its

sanctions against Libya, and a considerable trade in oil, natural gas, and machinery has opened up, from which the US remains largely excluded. A steady stream of EU ministers have also visited the Libyan capital Tripoli. Only the awkward business of Flight 103 remained to be resolved for business as usual to be resumed."

What makes Lockerbie so complex is that from the very first warnings apparently issued to intelligence services in 1988 to the present trial, every development has been influenced by changes in political relations in the Middle East. Many of the parties involved have a vested interest in maintaining silence, or presenting an extremely distorted version of events. This applies to the US and British governments, but also to the Syrian-backed Palestinian group the PFLP-GC, MeBo who are said to have manufactured the bomb timer found amongst the debris, the Syrian, Libyan and Iranian governments, et al.

Although the defence has yet to present its case—and I expect more information will be aired through their efforts to incriminate Palestinian groups—it is becoming clear that, firstly, there are considerable unresolved areas of factual evidence. Secondly, there has never been an objective assessment made of the rather concrete and much disputed claims over US intelligence warnings and involvement. Thirdly, no study to date of which I am aware has rooted an investigation of the bombing itself and the twists of subsequent investigations in the broader context of Middle Eastern political relations. That work remains to be done and can only be undertaken independently of all the governments, parties, and companies that are collectively responsible for the present state of misinformation.

Thanks again for your comments,

Steve James

Dear WSWs

Was there ever a trial of suspects for the shooting down of the Iranian Airbus on July 3rd, 1988?

Is there any evidence proving or indicating beyond reasonable doubt the Lockerbie Pan Am 103 explosion as revenge for the shooting down of the Airbus? If there is, where is it?

Is it not a fact that the US Naval Officer at the time, commanding the ship that shot down the Iranian Airbus, was decorated by the US Government?

What proof do you have the US changed to Libya as prime culprit for Lockerbie, in enlisting Iran and Syria as allies in preparing for the Gulf War?

Is there a precedent for the legal engineering which converted a former US military base in Holland into Scottish Territory for the purpose of prosecuting two Libyan suspects charged with blowing up a US plane over the British Isles?

ED

Mexico

Steve James replies on behalf of the WSWs

Dear ED

In answer to your questions—no there was never a trial of those responsible for the Iran Air 655 shootdown, and yes I believe that the commander of the USS Vincennes was later decorated. The attack on the airbus took place during a one-sided firefight between the modern and heavily armed cruiser Vincennes and some Iranian inflatable dinghies armed with machine guns. This occurred at a point in Middle Eastern relations when the US was acting with extreme belligerence towards Iran. The US had backed Iraq in the bloody eight-year conflict between Iran and Iraq. The Iranian Airbus took off along a regular civil route, and was climbing slowly when the Vincennes fired two missiles at it. The US described the shootdown as a "tragic mistake", the Iranian government saw it as an act of war and promised revenge. I believe the US did, in the end, pay some compensation to the Iranian government around the time of an International Court of Justice hearing in 1997, although they had paid compensation to non-Iranian victims much earlier.

Regarding the level of Iranian involvement in the Lockerbie attack, I do not wish to speculate. There is no clear evidence of this, even from those alleging involvement by the Palestinian group the PFLP-GC and Syria. But many commentators have noted the flimsiness of the evidence against Libya, as it rests principally on the controversial MeBo timer, discovered under dubious circumstances in 1990.

Nothing presented so far confirms who carried out the Lockerbie bombing, just the ongoing disintegration of the prosecution case at Camp Zeist. The CIA initially blamed the Iranians for the bombing until the change of line to Libya. But it is not at all inconceivable that the Iranian government had little or no involvement and were targeted because at the time it was politically convenient for the USA.

On the trial venue itself — no again, there is no precedent of which I am aware. See www.thelockerbietrial.com for background information.

I hope this is helpful,

Steve James



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