

US anthrax attackers aimed to assassinate Democratic leaders

Media silent on military links

Jerry White
23 January 2002

In the more than three months since anthrax-infected letters were mailed to US Senators Tom Daschle and Patrick Leahy, evidence has emerged about the source and motives of the attack which has vast political implications.

It is now generally accepted that the anthrax came from a domestic source, not from the Middle East. Given the fact that the intended victims were prominent leaders of the Democratic Party, it is clear that the perpetrators must be linked to right-wing organizations in the US. In December, the anthrax in the letters was traced to biological warfare facilities run by the US military.

Most recently, the *Washington Post* reported January 21 that at least 27 biological warfare specimens, including anthrax bacteria, had gone unaccounted for at the Army's Fort Detrick, Maryland lab, prompting an internal investigation in 1992. Lab workers told the *Post* that they had produced anthrax in powder form, contrary to official claims that the lab generated only "wet" anthrax, which is less dangerous.

Citing interviews with lab personnel, the newspaper concluded: "the emerging details are consistent with the increasingly popular hypothesis that last fall's bioterrorist attacks were the work of a current or former Fort Detrick scientist."

In other words, the leaders of the Democratic Party were targeted for assassination by right-wing elements that have some connection to the military. This staggering fact, however, has been met with a strange silence by the media, government officials and the Democrats themselves, including the two senators who were targeted.

Investigators have determined that the letters contained weapons-grade anthrax, which an FBI microbiologist said was designed for "overkill." Two postal workers at the mail facility where the tainted letters were processed died after being exposed to up to 3,000 times the lethal dosage of the bacteria, while scores of Senate office workers were only spared because they were quickly treated.

The anthrax powder has been genetically traced to a single US military source: the Army's Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah, the only facility known to have processed anthrax into the highly lethal powder form found in the letters. The spores in the letters to Daschle and Leahy were identical to those sent from Dugway to the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Disease (USAMRID) at Fort Detrick, in Frederick, Maryland, just outside

of Washington, DC, and to a CIA lab in Langley, Virginia.

Within political and media circles it is generally conceded that the assassination plot was hatched by right-wing elements in the US. In a barely reported comment last month Senator Daschle told a CNN interviewer, almost in passing, that he believes the most likely suspect in the attacks was someone related to the US military. But neither Daschle, Leahy, nor any other Democratic Party spokesman has sought to make an issue of this attempted political murder.

The news media all but dropped mention of anthrax once it became clear that neither Osama bin Laden nor Saddam Hussein was responsible for the attacks and the White House could no longer use such claims to bolster its war effort and sweeping assault on civil liberties. As the military link to the attacks came to light, the media sought to blunt the significance of the exposure. Typical was *Time* magazine, which attempted to reassure its readers: "While the possibility of an Army connection has raised a few eyebrows, investigators are urging people not to jump to any conclusions."

Daschle and Leahy have long been targets of vitriol by the extreme right of the Republican Party, which considers them hardcore opponents of Bush's agenda. As Senate Majority Leader, Daschle is the most prominent Democratic officeholder and a possible challenger to Bush in the 2004 presidential elections. He has been the subject of a non-stop smear campaign by the *Wall Street Journal*, which accused Daschle in an editorial last November of "conducting his own guerilla war against Mr. Bush, blocking the President's [domestic] agenda at every turn." The statement was only one of many designed to incite reactionary elements with whom the *Journal* is politically and ideologically allied and which are tied to the Republicans and the military.

As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Vermont Senator Leahy has been a target of anti-abortion fanatics and the most hawkish military types for delaying Bush's judicial appointments and raising mild criticisms over military tribunals and other violations of civil liberties.

During the Clinton administration the Republican Party repeatedly sought to incite the most reactionary elements in the military with claims the Democratic president was undermining military preparedness, selling nuclear secrets to China and engaged in other disloyal acts. In a thinly veiled effort to stir up violence

against Clinton, North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms told a television interviewer that it would be dangerous for Clinton to visit the military bases in his state. Because of the president's views on gays in the military and his opposition to the Vietnam War, the senator said, "Mr. Clinton better watch out if he comes down here. He'd better have a bodyguard."

During the Monica Lewinsky affair some members of the officer corps openly defied laws prohibiting them from publicly expressing contempt for civilian political authorities. Several active-duty officers wrote letters published in the *Navy Times* and *Army Times*, which denounced Clinton as a "criminal," while others circulated petitions supporting the impeachment and removal of their nominal commander-in-chief.

The Republicans' theft of the 2000 presidential election relied to a great extent on their connections to the military brass. With the Bush camp fearing a recount of votes would eliminate their narrow lead in Florida, the Republicans mobilized military officials to supply large numbers of absentee ballots from armed forces personnel stationed overseas. Many of the ballots lacked postmarks or bore postmarks later than Election Day, suggesting that there was a concerted effort to solicit late votes and ship them without postmarks so as to conceal the fact they were illegal.

The Bush campaign then launched a witch-hunting attack on Democratic candidate Al Gore, portraying the efforts of the Democrats to weed out invalid military ballots as an anti-American attack on the armed forces. Montana Governor Marc Racicot, a leading spokesman for the Bush campaign, told a press conference: "The vice president's lawyers have gone to war, in my judgment, against the men and women who serve in the armed forces." Retired General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of US forces in the Persian Gulf War, denounced Gore for denying servicemen their right to vote.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, Republican officials such as Attorney General John Ashcroft portrayed the slightest questioning of Bush's attacks on democratic rights as aiding and abetting the terrorists. Even after the anthrax attacks Daschle and Leahy continued to be targeted by right-wing talk show hosts and newspaper columnists who denounced them for undermining national security. The national conservative weekly *Human Events* ran an article about Leahy with the prominent headline "Osama's Enabler in Congress," sparking scores of hate messages to his office.

Daschle came under particular attack for opposing the billions more in tax breaks included in Bush's so-called economic stimulus package. Ads were circulated in Daschle's home state of South Dakota featuring side-by-side photographs of him and Saddam Hussein. Bush administration officials refused to distance themselves from the right-wing campaign, with Vice President Dick Cheney denouncing Daschle as an "obstructionist" on NBC's "Meet the Press" in mid-December, claiming the Democratic senator was blocking an economic recovery.

The Bush administration has clearly pursued a double standard when it comes to fighting the so-called war on terrorism. It has carried out a dragnet against Arab immigrants but has done nothing to round up right-wing domestic terrorists. Bush immediately held bin Laden and the Taliban responsible for the

September 11 attack and began bombing Afghanistan, but White House officials now predict that finding the perpetrators of the anthrax attacks could take years.

The connections between the military and white supremacist and militia groups are well known, and there are numerous cases of weapons and ammunition from military bases going missing and ending up in the hands of the far right. But rather than pursue such an investigation, homeland security chief Tom Ridge has discounted the military connections to the anthrax attacks as just one of "multiple leads" in the case.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not claim to know the exact nature of the anthrax attacks and to what extent they involved elements in the military. One thing is certain, however: there is a great need to seriously investigate these connections.

Anyone who thinks it is preposterous that elements within the state apparatus and the backers of the Bush administration could actively be involved in an assassination attempt or could have condoned such an act should consider recent history in the United States.

From the series of shutdowns of the federal government in 1995-96, to the impeachment drive against Clinton and the theft of the 2000 election, the Republican Party has shown it no longer plays by the traditional rules of bourgeois democracy. After being thwarted by popular opposition during the 1990s, the right has concluded it can only achieve its agenda through extra-parliamentary and illegal methods. That these forces will resort to violence was demonstrated during the 2000 election when a Republican mob attacked officials recounting votes in south Florida. At the time the *Wall Street Journal* urged Bush to use an "iron fist" against his opponents.

In the face of such attacks the Democrats have proven their unwillingness and incapacity to wage a genuine struggle against these fascistic forces. They respond with cowardice even as leaders of their party are targeted for assassination. At the same time the Democrats have concealed from the American people the extent of the danger posed by the ultra-right.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact