

Judge's family slain

Bush administration keeps silent on terrorist killings in US

Bill Van Auken
5 March 2005

President George W. Bush swore in his new Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff March 3, bragging about his administration having “busted up terrorist cells around the globe,” while warning that “Al Qaeda still hopes to attack us on our own soil.” He sought to dramatize his remarks by sharing a dubious piece of intelligence that had Osama bin Laden urging Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—blamed by Washington for many terrorist attacks in Iraq—to plan actions in other countries, including the US.

The remarks sparked a flurry of media commentary. Many noted that the US president had remained largely silent on Al Qaeda and bin Laden over the past period, as his administration made the conquest of Iraq the focus of Washington's so-called war on terrorism.

More significantly, however, in the midst of all the talk of terrorism, neither the president nor his new secretary made any mention of the fact that just days earlier what is evidently one of the gravest acts of terrorism since September 11, 2001 had taken place on US soil.

The husband and mother of US District Court Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow were murdered, execution style, in their suburban Chicago home. Both Michael Lefkow, who was married to the judge for 30 years, and his 89-year-old mother-in-law Donna Humphrey were herded into the basement of their home and shot through the backs of their heads.

The police have focused their investigation on the white-supremacist and fascist right. Judge Lefkow became a target of a hate campaign and then an assassination plot as a result of her role in a court case involving Matthew Hale, leader of the “Creativity Movement,” one of the largest and most violent US neo-

Nazi groups.

Hale is currently in jail, waiting to be sentenced for soliciting the murder of Judge Lefkow, who had earned the wrath of the fascist outfit by ordering it to stop using the name World Church of the Creator, which a religious organization in Oregon had trademarked.

The neo-Nazis got a hold of Lefkow's address as well as pictures of her family and posted them on the Internet, with none-to-subtle suggestions that their supporters should hunt them down. After the bodies of the judge's husband and mother were discovered, visitors to fascist web sites were celebrating the killings.

The cold-blooded murder of two people, who according to reports were both disabled and could not escape their assassins, is a heinous crime. From the standpoint of the state, the murder of a judge's relatives as an act of retaliation and intimidation over a court ruling is one of the most serious attacks imaginable on the rule of law.

Yet the crime has elicited no public condemnation, nor even a word of concern or condolence, from the Bush administration, which regularly denounces similar killings when they take place in Iraq.

In the face of a brazen and vicious terrorist act, what is to explain this peculiar silence from an administration that has declared its very reason for existence to be the waging of a worldwide crusade against terrorism?

Clearly, it is not the brutal nature of the act, but the politics of the suspected actors that has shaped the administration's reaction. Had the judge and her family been targeted by Al Qaeda, there would have been an uproar in Washington, in all likelihood accompanied by

another roundup of hapless Muslim immigrants.

The official indifference to these killings speaks volumes about the nature of the so-called war on terrorism proclaimed by both major political parties. It is not directed at protecting the American people from acts of violence, but rather serves as the pretext for furthering a violent militarist agenda on the part of Washington itself.

The Bush White House has no interest in diverting the “war on terrorism” from this predatory agenda. Therefore an act of terrorism and the threat of even bloodier terrorist attacks from a homegrown fascist right is met with silence.

There is something else even more poisonous involved here, however. The degree of separation between the politics of those suspected of organizing the killings of the judge’s husband and mother and the positions subscribed to by a significant layer in the extreme right-wing base of the Republican Party is not all that great.

This political affinity was evident at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference held in Washington just last month. This gathering of some 4,000 rightists was addressed by Vice President Cheney, Bush’s chief advisor Karl Rove, at least two cabinet members and a number of leading US senators and congressmen.

One of the recurrent themes both from the platform and the floor of the conference was the vilification of “activist liberal judges” as the enemies of morality.

The depraved right-wing columnist Ann Coulter was one of the crowd’s favorites, earning a raucous ovation for equating liberals with terrorists. Her most popular line was a reprise of her statement regretting that the so-called “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh had not been sentenced to death. “We need to execute people like John Walker in order to physically intimidate liberals by making them realize that they could be killed, too,” she said.

To what extent the politics of the victims themselves is a factor in the administration’s calculations is an open question. Judge Lefkow was appointed to the US District Court by Democratic President Bill Clinton. Her murdered husband was a participant in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and spent much of his life as a labor lawyer and a legal defender of the poor.

In short, the victims were “liberals,” the very the

people that Coulter affirms should be “physically” intimidated by “making them realize that they could be killed too.” Those who executed Michael Lefkow and Donna Humphrey with a bullet through the back of the head were acting upon a perspective not that dissimilar from the one she outlined before Bush’s cheering supporters.

The neo-fascist Hale was not unconscious of the potential of drawing support from this wider ultra-right Republican base. Significantly, when his group began its campaign against Judge Lefkow, it claimed provocatively—and falsely—that her ruling on the trademark case was an order that his supporters burn their bibles, a charge calculated to appeal to the Christian right.

The neo-fascists and white supremacists organized in groups like Hale’s “Creativity” movement are miniscule in number. But they are able to find succor in the increasingly right-wing character not only of the Republican Party, but also of the entire bourgeois political order in the United States.

The killings in Chicago—and the official indifference with which they have been met—serve as a warning. Under the cover of an administration proclaiming its dedication to a war on terror, genuinely terrorist elements of the extreme right are being incubated within the US itself.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact