

BEAT THE DEVIL.

Fathers and Sons

I'd just been reading an interview with Justice Brennan in *Irish America* when news came that he was hanging up his robes. Brennan's reminiscences are laced with a sense of history, a sympathy for the travails of ordinary humans. The younger crowd on the Court doesn't look as if it spends much time thinking about how life looks from the bottom of the barrel.

Brennan described how his father, an Irish immigrant, got a job shoveling coal at Ballantine's brewery in Newark. He soon found that conditions were very bad for the workers there, so "he started organizing within Ballantine's and then spread around to the other breweries around the city. Remember, there were no trade laws to help you in those days. You just had to fight your way through."

Brennan's father did well enough in this strike that he began to rise in the ranks of organized labor around Newark. Then came a statewide trolley strike, eventually broken because the police moved at the behest of the McCarter family who, as Brennan recalls, "really ran the state." In an effort to head off a more sweeping onslaught on their power the city bigwigs named Brennan's father a police commissioner, but "he promptly showed where he stood in the labor disputes and then that led to one fight after another." In the end he and his comrades "swept away the whole government," and he wound up running the Department of Public Safety. This paradigm, that justice exists to serve everyone, has stuck with Brennan all his life.

Brennan, Marshall and Blackmun all turned 21 around the time of the stock market crash of 1929 and spent their early professional years watching the Depression gnaw through the country. Marshall's father, William, the grandson of a slave, was a yacht club steward. Blackmun's father ran a grocery and hardware store in St. Paul. His son has recalled that they lived in a blue-collar neighborhood and "because I grew up in poor surroundings, I know there's another world out there that we sometimes forget about." (Goldberg and Fortas, two liberal Justices who left the Court, were also in this age bracket. Goldberg, one of eleven children, was the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant who sold vegetables from the back of a wagon. Fortas was an English cabinetmaker's son.)

The next cohort of Justices are White, Stevens and Rehnquist, born respectively in 1917, 1920 and 1924. White, a law-and-order judge, had a dad in the notoriously antiunion lumber business. Alpha White also served as Mayor of Wellington, Colorado. Stevens, somewhat of a liberal individualist, was the son of a wealthy businessman in Chicago. Chief Justice Rehnquist spent his childhood in a well-to-do suburb of Milwaukee (which had a socialist mayor in the 1930s). His father was a wholesale paper salesman who never attended college. His mother had a bachelor's degree and together with her husband instilled in the children reverence for the views of Alf Landon and Herbert Hoover.

Reagan's appointees—O'Connor, Scalia and Kennedy—all came of age in the swell of the Eisenhower fifties, when the tide still purported to lift all boats. O'Connor's father

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was a rancher in the Southwest. (The head on this item is intended to evoke Turgenev's great novel, though properly, as I'm sure many are eager to point out, it should be *Fathers and Sons and Daughter*.) Scalia's father, Eugene, was a professor of romance languages who had immigrated from Italy, and Kennedy's old man was a Catholic Republican lawyer and lobbyist well known in Sacramento.

Souter? He reached maturity in the year that Nixon lost to Kennedy, and his father was a banker. The family moved from Massachusetts to Republican New Hampshire. For liberals it doesn't look good, unless Souter despised his father as a Nixon man and, if confirmed, will spend the next half-century getting his own back. He seems profoundly repressed and, who knows, could explode into judicial activism. In my view the great loss to the Court was Douglas Ginsburg, that child of the sixties who left college to run a dating service and smoked at least one joint at Harvard. His father, Maurice, was a mortgage financier, which always gives one insight into the human condition.



Guiltlessly Guilty

On Friday, June 29, *The New York Times* ran a photograph with its lead editorial: a jubilant *contra* bathed in the smiles of Obando y Bravo and Violeta Chamorro. The headline announced, "The Contra War, 1981-1990." Two weeks later *contras* were battling Sandinista strikers.

The editorial said Washington had been "ensnared in horrors like assassination manuals, the clandestine mining of Nicaraguan harbors and the still-reverberating Iran-contra scandal." This is like some old Nazi editorialist on Goebbels's *Das Reich* saying that Germany was "ensnared" in World War II and accompanying war crimes.

Guilt is not part of the imperial character profile. *Moscow News* for June 3 had a pleasant interview with William Colby, who was in Moscow at a press seminar organized by New York University's Center for War, Peace and the News Media, a dreadful gaggle of self-seekers. In its introduction to the interview, conducted by Andrei Bezruchenko and Wendy Sloane, *Moscow News* says of Colby that "his tenure with the CIA was marked by tension over Vietnam." The questioning is equally fiery:

MN: Were there times when you felt any personal conflict between what the government told you to do and what you wanted to do?

Colby: No, I could work it out.

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At least he didn't say he was "ensnared" into running the Phoenix program, by which at least 20,000 Vietnamese were assassinated.

MN: So the Vietnam war as an idea was correct?

Colby: Yeah. We did it wrong, we did it wrong. I think we should have been supporting the people in the villages against the so-called people's war and we really insisted on fighting a soldier's war.

If I had a rocket launcher . . .

Fathers and Guardians

In the same year, 1948, that the young Colby was helping his boss, C.I.A. founder William Donovan, protect the murderers of CBS reporter George Polk, three left journalists, Cedric Belfrage, James Aronson and John T. McManus, were founding the *National Guardian*. Belfrage and Aronson had met in Germany, where they were trying to carry out Eisenhower's orders to set up a post-Nazi German press with people who had resisted fascism. Of course such resisters included German Communists.

Since the actual purpose of postwar U.S. policy, set by George Kennan and other such heroes of *Moscow News* and the N.Y.U. center, was to make sure that West Germany was not de-Nazified in any meaningful sense of the word, Belfrage and Aronson's efforts later counted against them, as did the existence of the *National Guardian*, which along with *Monthly Review* (begun in 1949) was a lonely voice in those days. At the high crest of McCarthyism, Belfrage, a British citizen, was deported. He eventually settled in Cuernavaca, where he died on June 21 at the age of 85.

I never had the good fortune to meet him. To a fundraiser for *The Guardian* in San Francisco in 1988 at which I was a speaker, he sent this message: "Your celebration means a lot to me as the first editor of *The Guardian*. I was particularly glad to hear from John [Trinkl] that your speaker tonight is Alexander Cockburn . . . because he is the son of my old friend Claud, who can also take some credit for tonight's affair. For in the early Hitler years before World War II, when I was a respectably non-political movie critic in London, I was one of many journalists and others influenced toward the left by Claud. I truly believe that had I not got to know Claud at that time, the *Guardian* might never have been launched—at least not by me as one of the founding trio."

Something else to blame the old dad for. In Britain, which remains obsessed with spies to the exclusion of all else, there is a vigorous industry of parahistorians trying to prove that Comrade C was the Comintern "control" for Roger Hollis, head of British counterintelligence. Peter Wright's book, *Spy-catcher*, is mostly about the efforts of a particularly crazed faction inside the British security establishment to prove Hollis's treachery.

Wright thought it enough to point out that Hollis and Cockburn had attended Oxford at about the same time in the early 1920s, as if that were conclusive evidence of some later partnership in remitting secrets to Moscow. Another of

Wright's suspects, also at Oxford in the early 1920s, was Maurice Richardson, a longtime TV critic for *The Observer*. A great comic writer. I still steal his jokes occasionally. Someone here should reissue his *Exploits of Engelbrecht the Dwarf*, a masterpiece of the comic surreal. One of the stories has Earth fielding its all-star team in a rugby game against Mars. Marx is at scrum half, shouting "Heel you *Teufels*, heel in the name of History!"

So at the age of 19 or so Richardson and Cockburn were supposedly already carrying forward Moscow's fell program. When the stuff about Hollis began to come up publicly in 1981, shortly before my father died, he tried to explain to excited journalists phoning Ardmore from London that, unlike his schoolfriend Graham Greene, who had joined the party briefly at some amazingly young age, at Oxford he himself was still of soundly conventional views and was, indeed to his shame, on the wrong side of the barricades in the Great Strike of 1926. He did know Hollis's brother Chris very well, but not Roger, who came up to Oxford three years after him—an immense gulf given the rigid cohorts of that time.

None of this did him much good, since in these matters crazed spy-hunters merely say that scabbing in 1926 was "cover," thus confirming their suspicions. But if indeed my father was Roger Hollis's "contact" in the postwar period the men in Moscow chose a complicated way of getting in touch with their supposed creature Hollis. We lived in rural Ireland without a phone and he would have had to receive and relay Moscow's commands from the call box of one of the pubs in town where, as always in Ireland, people are under close surveillance. There was a Catholic zealot who used to drink in The Nook, at the bottom of Church Street in Youghal, who believed that my father and Willie French, the sexton at the Protestant church up the hill, were adepts in Freemasonry and used The Nook to advance conspiracy. One time he saw Willie slip a paper into my father's overcoat pocket and promptly called the Gardai, who came and said that maybe things would quiet down if my father showed what exactly it was that Willie had given him. My father dragged out the paper from his pocket, a bit awkwardly because Willie was not only the sexton but the local process server, and the imagined agenda of Freemasonry was actually a writ to appear in court for nonpayment of bills.

I gather that now the same gang boosting the Cockburn-Hollis connection are saying that Belfrage was similarly Moscow's pawn in espionage. Since the man is dead it's easy to say it. In my father's case, when the war was over he left the *Daily Worker* without undue fuss and headed to Ireland to begin a new phase of his life writing fiction. Stalin was busy shooting his close friends like Mikhail Koltzov, and another buddy, Otto Katz, was hanged in Prague, saying before his death that he had been led into the path of counterrevolution by Colonel Claud Cockburn of the M.I.5. My father said he reckoned Katz had been asked to denounce someone and thought that Claud was unlikely to suffer painful consequences if Katz gave his name to the executioners.

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When Belfrage was battling deportation he addressed a rally in the following terms:

Let us not be blind to the fact that the majority of Americans are under the spell of a few men who rule their destinies and mold their minds—and these rulers and molders can only be properly described as know-nothings who make glory out of knowing nothing, because to know is to shatter the entire edifice of fraud that has been built up.

Belfrage tried to let people know. These days I think that mostly they do know. They know it's all an edifice of fraud and are just awaiting some good ideas on what to do about it.

■ A Nod's as Good as a Wink

"We want to emphasize once again in the strongest possible terms that the CIA neither engages in nor condones drug trafficking." Joseph DeTrani, director of public affairs for the C.I.A., was compelled to release that statement after recent developments in the Los Angeles trial of four men accused of involvement in the 1985 murder of drug agent Enrique Camarena.

Defense lawyers forced the U.S. government to hand over Drug Enforcement Administration reports regarding Lawrence Victor Harrison, a witness who worked for major Mexican drug traffickers. Harrison had told the D.E.A. he had heard that in the early 1980s guerrillas—presumably *contras*—were trained at a ranch in Mexico owned by drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, now imprisoned in Mexico for participating in the Camarena murder. Harrison further said the camp was watched over by Mexico's corrupt and powerful Federal Security Directorate and sponsored by the C.I.A.

Harrison's information is secondhand and he's not a model citizen, so DeTrani can get away with denying that the agency used Mexico as a training site for *contras* and colluded with drug traffickers there. But the general thrust of his denial—that the C.I.A. would not involve itself with drug smugglers—is contradicted by the public record. Leaving aside the well-hashed Noriega connection, let's review some old evidence.

In February 1986, Robert Owen, Oliver North's courier to the *contras*, wrote North: "No doubt you know the DC-4 Foley got was used at one time to run drugs, and part of the crew had criminal records. Nice group the Boys choose." Owen later testified that he was referring to a plane used to fly supplies to the *contras*, that Foley was someone with "connections with a government agency" and that "the Boys" meant the C.I.A.

During hearings conducted by Senator John Kerry in 1988, former C.I.A.-assisted *contras* testified that they had a symbiotic relationship with traffickers. Karol Prado said the rebels in the Southern Front provided fuel to drug-ferrying pilots who used *contra* airstrips. Octaviano César maintained that C.I.A. and U.S. military officials told him it was O.K. to accept assistance from a known drug trafficker "as long as we don't deal with the powder."

Then there's the testimony of the C.I.A.'s own Joseph Fernandez, who served as chief of station in Costa Rica and worked on the *contra* program. He told the Iran/*contra* committees that Company policy was to stay away from drug-tainted individuals. But, he added, there was "one exception to that, and that was a matter of higher authority over me." In that instance the "higher authority" ordered Fernandez to keep working with persons who he believed were involved in the drug trade.

DeTrani's statement could well be truthful, in a crafty fashion. C.I.A. officials probably don't engage in drug dealing themselves. But the evidence clearly suggests some have an uncommon ability to work or, at the least, coexist with drugrunners—in pursuit, of course, of larger interests.

■ In for a Penny, in for a Billion

The Air Force recently engaged in some fancy rhetorical footwork of its own. In response to a report from the Union of Concerned Scientists criticizing the B-2 Stealth bomber for having "no compelling mission" and being "unaffordable," the Air Force fired back a rebuttal, which it sent to every member of Congress. The Air Force's argument—and the fact that it responded—signal its desperation:

Certainly it is not hard to understand why some deem the B-2 as unaffordable because its cost is high and easily measured. The best way to think about cost, however, is to focus on what we can affect from today forward.

Why is that the best? Because more than one-half of the \$62 billion total estimated cost of the B-2 program has already been "invested." If B-2 production funds are eliminated after 1990 the Air Force will be left, after an "investment" of \$35.4 billion, with a measly fifteen aircraft, sixty short of what current plans call for—"almost no combat capability." The next sixty, the Air Force notes, will cost only \$25.7 billion (that is, if there are no cost overruns). Don't cry over spilled billions, the service suggests. At less than \$500 million a bird, the B-2 program is now a steal, and no longer the most expensive weapons program.

■ Good Point—Now Turn Over All Your Records

In May the National Agenda for Peace in El Salvador, a Washington-based group of U.S. activists and church groups, ran an ad in *The Washington Post* calling for a suspension of aid to El Salvador. Sixty-eight prominent Americans signed the ad, including eighteen Episcopal, Lutheran and Catholic bishops, Coretta Scott King and former New Mexico Governor Toney Anaya. A month later, the group heard back from the Bush Administration, via a letter from the Justice Department's criminal division. The letter stated that the ad "indicates that you are engaged in publicity activities on behalf of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front," the Marxist guerrillas, and therefore the group might have to register as a foreign agent. The letter asked that National Agenda provide the Justice Department with information on

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its activities and declare whether it is "directed, controlled, financed or subsidized" by a foreign entity. The apparent reasoning underlying the letter: Americans who oppose the Administration must be fronting for a foreign group. National Agenda says it has no financial or organizational ties with the F.M.L.N., and the Justice Department doesn't suggest it possesses evidence to the contrary. The American Civil Liberties Union, which believes the government's action is unprecedented, has asked the department to rescind its request, arguing that demanding such information in response to an act of political speech violates the First Amendment. A Justice Department spokesperson said the request was "fairly routine."