
Abscam

Pratt decision aimed to throw Senate vote

by Mary Jane Freeman

Judge George C. Pratt of the Federal District Court in Uniondale, N.Y., denied on Dec. 21 all due process motions submitted by Sen. Harrison Williams of New Jersey in his fight to stop his frame-up by the Abscam witch-hunt of the Carter Justice Department. Within 24 hours, Pratt's decision became the rallying point for renewed demands that Williams be immediately expelled from the Senate, in which he has served for 23 years.

Williams had won a postponement of proceedings against him in the Senate until January, when he intends to place before the Senate the suppressed documents of the FBI and the Justice Department proving his innocence of all charges brought against him by U.S. Prosecutor Thomas Puccio in a trial before Pratt that ended May 1, 1981.

Now that Judge George Pratt has ruled against Williams—denying the significance of the evidence Williams has brought forth since his trial—the liberal press is demanding his speedy expulsion. “The excuse the Senate has used to postpone the day of judgment for Harrison Williams is no longer available,” drummed the *New York Times* Dec. 22. “Even a ruling for the defense would not have changed the Senators’ duty: to judge their colleague’s conduct by ethical standards far stricter than the criminal law.”

It was the same *New York Times* that on the basis of information supplied by Thomas Puccio had broken the Abscam story on Feb. 2, 1980, a full 24 hours before the news of the investigations of U.S. Congressmen was even released by the FBI.

In every point of his 62-page document, Judge Pratt acted to confirm the charges brought by Williams’s defenders: namely, that if he can be framed up in such a blatant way with impunity then American democracy is in clear and present danger. The Williams case has so far, in the words of former U.S. Solicitor General Erwin Griswold, set the precedent for “the police state, which we have always shunned.”

In his decision, Pratt not only dismissed the evidence of Williams’s innocence, but used the same formulations as U.S. Prosecutor Thomas Puccio, a man whose ethical standards have now openly been called into question in his conduct of the Justice Department case against Labor

Secretary Raymond Donovan.

Pratt’s peculiar view

The keystone of Williams’s due-process motion was the suppression by Puccio and Pratt during the trial of an FBI memo dated Nov. 27, in which the investigators against Williams admitted that they had no evidence against him—after more than 10 months of attempting to entrap Williams in wrong-doing. When the document was later shown to Williams’s juror Salvatore Ottavino, Ottavino wrote a sworn affidavit to the effect that he would not have voted for a guilty charge against Williams if the document had been presented in trial.

Pratt continues: “Merely because some government employees were not overly impressed with the strength of the Williams case as of November 27, 1979, does not mean that the government was precluded from testing the sufficiency of its evidence before a grand jury. . .

“The court concludes that the existence of the November 27, 1979, memorandum suggesting that further specific proof be adduced of Williams’s criminal propensity before seeking an indictment against him does not preclude the government from proceeding *even when the additional evidence is not forthcoming*” (emphasis added).

Not only was there no “evidence forthcoming,” but when “recontacted” by Abscam sting man Mel Weinberg and offered a bribe, Williams, as shown in the Justice Department’s own videotape records, stated distinctly, “No, no, no.”

But Williams was indicted and convicted on charges of “influence-peddling.” This was also a result of entrapment from the Justice Department, since Weinberg had instructed Williams to impress the FBI’s “Arab sheik” with his influence. Pratt dismissed the entrapment by stating: “Williams’ fine educational background, his long political experience, the heights to which he had risen in the councils of government, all argue overwhelmingly against any claim that people such as [Camden, N.J. Mayor] Errichetti and Weinberg could ‘put words in his mouth’ or make him say things that he did not mean or did not want to say.”

Pratt, however, does not question why a member of such long-standing in the “councils of government” should ever have been targeted by the Justice Department for a “sting operation.”

False claims

Pratt also upheld Puccio’s attempt to introduce evidence that would taint Senator Williams with corruption. Puccio insinuated that Williams had tried to make a deal with New Jersey Casino Control Commission Chairman Joseph Lordi on behalf of a particular company, due to a presumed relationship between the company and the Senator’s wife.

But an FBI document dated April 25, 1980, shows that Puccio's "evidence" did not exist. The FBI memo stated:

"To date, the investigation has determined that it is common for a political officeholder to make inquiries on status of requests for expeditious action to the Casino Control Commission. In this instance, however, *there is no evidence that Williams made such inquiry or recommendation to Lord*" (emphasis added).

The casino issue was not part of the indictment, but Puccio continually referenced it during the trial to "taint" Williams—with no objection from Pratt.

In his decision, Pratt ruled on this question as follows: "Logically, such evidence [albeit nonexistent] is relevant to Williams' state of mind; absent a claim that somehow the Abscam investigators also induced defendant Williams's overtures to members of New Jersey's Casino Control Commission, a claim not made here, such conduct is legally admissible to show defendants' motive, . . . intent, . . . and method of operation."

Williams had also complained in his due-process motion that the Justice Department had used as evidence against him a letter—written and forged by Camden Mayor Errichetti in Williams' name—claiming to guarantee government contracts for the titanium mine that was the subject of Williams's meeting with the FBI's Arab sheik. Pratt dismisses Williams's complaint, stating that forgery is "merely a technique" which "furthered the overall investigation."

Pratt concludes his decision with the statement that while he found some of Williams's charges of outrageous conduct on the part of the prosecution supported, "other instances that did occur did not prejudice any rights of the defendants." Therefore, Williams's conviction is upheld, and the United States Senator must appear before him for sentencing.

Given Pratt's strange interpretation of the evidence or lack thereof, it is not difficult to see why Puccio demanded a change in venue for Williams's and other Abscam victims' cases to Pratt's Eastern District Court.

Down to the wire

Senator Williams now has one more forum remaining to prove his innocence: the U.S. Senate. No Senator has been expelled from that legislative body since the Civil War, when the charge was treason against the nation.

If the Senate now votes against Williams, it will have voted for its own dissolution. The outcome in the Senate will not only depend upon the evidence which Williams is permitted to put before the Congress, but the degree of pressure that the American people place upon their Senators to uphold the U.S. Constitution and vote against the Abscam-Justice Department political witch-hunt.

Part Three



Sheridan's operations against Teamsters

by Richard McGraw

We enter 1982 with the expectation that publication of dossiers like this one, and our just-completed Special Report on "Permindex: Britain's International Assassination Bureau," will play a role in preventing a repeat of the preceding "Year of the Assassins." Walter Sheridan is one of the most important, if least-known, operatives for Permindex. He is currently Minority Chief Investigator for the Senate Labor Committee.

The first two parts of our Sheridan dossier excerpts outlined the 30-year history of the covert intimidator both inside and outside the U.S. government, who became known for his behind-the-scenes power as "the 101st Senator." Part Two paid particular attention to the methods of blackmail and dirty tricks used by Sheridan to wreck New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation into the assassination of John F. Kennedy. We then took a look at a 1962 House Un-American Activities Committee investigation of Sheridan's activities at the National Security Agency (NSA), where he granted security clearance to two NSA employees who were known sexual perverts and who later defected to the U.S.S.R.

Part Three, which concludes the series, offers HUAC's conclusions, before moving on to explore Mr. Sheridan's unique role and resources in the Kennedy Justice Department's war on Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa.

The Mitchell-Martin case was not an isolated incident of lax security involving personnel practices. Investigators from other agencies contracted by NSA to conduct background checks had repeatedly found that information which they had provided to the NSA on its current