

CONVERGENCE

The Christic Institute

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Lawsuit identifies 'secret team'

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Christic Institute names key Iran/contra suspects months before scandal

By RUSTY MARTIN and ANDY LANG

In a civil lawsuit filed last year in Miami Federal Court, the Christic Institute has charged that the *contra* leadership and their private supporters planned the assassination of an American ambassador to provoke United States intervention in Nicaragua.

The lawsuit, which stems from a terrorist bombing in 1984, also alleges that the *contras* organized a complex operation to smuggle cocaine to several cities in the United States.

But the principal issue in the case, says Institute General Counsel Daniel Sheehan, centers on the covert operations of a "secret team" of retired Government officials and anti-Communist extremists who organize political assassinations and terrorist attacks on a global scale. According to Institute sources, the "team" was reactivated by Lt. Col. Oliver North to train and equip the *contras*.

The lawsuit was filed in May 1986 in United States District Court, Southern District of Florida. Institute attorneys are acting as "private attorneys general," using a Federal statute directed against organized crime to prosecute a shadowy group whose activities until now have been a carefully guarded secret.

The case will be heard in Miami by Judge James L. King. On Jan. 30 King denied motions filed by the defendants to dismiss the lawsuit, preparing the way for a jury trial next year.

The ruling means that the Christic Institute now has almost the same investigative powers as the Special Prosecutor and the special Congressional committees appointed to probe the Iran/*contra* scandal, including the power to subpoena bank records and interrogate witnesses under oath.

The lawsuit named the key suspects in the Iran/*contra* arms deal six months before the scandal surfaced in the press.

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Chernobyl and disinformation

Why our Government tried to cover up radiation dangers

By LANNY SINKIN

In 1986, the nuclear industry's worst nightmare became a deadly reality: the meltdown and rupture of a nuclear power reactor in the Soviet Ukraine.

The Chernobyl disaster claimed 31 lives and forced 135,000 Soviet citizens to evacuate their homes. The Soviet Government's official report estimates that radioactive contamination of the region's food supply will eventually cause 30,000 to 40,000 cancer deaths. A smaller number of cancer victims—at least 5,300—will perish from direct exposure to the radiation dispersed during the explosion and fire.

The Soviet report eliminates any doubt that Chernobyl was the worst industrial disaster in history. But in the days immediately following the explosion, a disinformation campaign was set in motion to persuade public opinion that the deadly effects of the radioactive cloud were unlikely to cross the Soviet border.

The source of this disinformation was not the Soviet Government, but the private companies and Federal agencies responsible for nuclear power and weapons production in the United States.

The first installment of the campaign appeared in *The New York Times* on April 29. "United States nuclear experts say they believe the Soviet reactor accident probably poses no danger outside the Soviet Union," the *Times* reported in the first sentence of an article describing the aftermath of the disaster. This reassuring conclusion was reached by "nuclear experts" and duly reported by the *Times* just three days after the accident, although the reporter admitted "the absence of detailed information" about the catastrophe.

Soon, Government sources in Stockholm reported that two extremely dangerous substances—radioactive isotopes of iodine and cesium—were falling on Sweden. This made no impression on the *Times*, which calmly announced that "it appeared that only very small amounts of radioactive material had drifted over Scandinavia from the Soviet Union and that all of it was probably in the form of relatively innocuous gases, xenon and krypton." These gases "disperse rapidly in the atmosphere and soon become so diluted as to be virtually harmless," said the *Times*.

The Swedes were alarmed, however, and with good reason. Cesium has a radioactive half-life of 30 years. The Soviet Government's prediction of 30,000 to 40,000 cancer deaths is based on the contamination of food supplies by cesium. In September, a scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory estimated

that the disaster emitted as much cesium as the combined total of all atmospheric nuclear tests since 1945.

The "United States nuclear experts" cited by the *Times* were sources in agencies responsible for the design and production of nuclear weapons. Their message to the media was simple: the effects of nuclear disasters are limited and localized. "The dominant fact of Chernobyl," wrote an apologist for the nuclear industry in the July 14 *New Republic*, "is that we now have empirical evidence on the scope of a real reactor disaster, and its dominant characteristic is hundreds of fatalities. Such an accident is comparable in scale to other disasters whose risks society has judged acceptable."

These experts were predictably skeptical when the Soviet scientist announced that the fatalities would not be in the hundreds, but in the tens of thousands. Government sources in the United States immediately scorned the official report (before they had seen a copy) as irresponsible and alarmist.

Circled the globe

After the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission subsidized a study of radiation releases from a hypothetical meltdown. An exploding reactor might expel quantities of radioactive iodine and cesium, the study concluded, but these hazardous elements would quickly cool and fall to the ground within a short radius from the plant.

This scenario coincides exactly with the expert opinion quoted in the press days after the Chernobyl disaster. But we now know that radioactive iodine from Chernobyl circled the globe, falling on Texas, Utah, Maryland. Radioactive particles from the disaster are still travelling in the atmosphere.

This is not what the nuclear industry and its promoters in the Federal Government wanted to believe. While the Reagan Administration might have been tempted to exploit the disaster to whip up anti-Soviet sentiment in North America and Western Europe, Federal agencies responsible for regulating nuclear power and manufacturing nuclear weapons had an overriding objective: to prevent public opinion from tracing any connection between Chernobyl and the nuclear program in the United States.

The nuclear establishment's early reaction could have been explained charitably as mere scientific error. Later events demonstrated, however, that the Government was deliberately misleading the public about the dangers of nuclear power and nuclear radiation.

Most people in the United States, for example, still believe that the Chernobyl reactors, unlike most commercial reactors in this country, lacked a containment building. This particular inaccuracy surfaced immediately after the accident, even though photographs of Chernobyl shown on television and published in newspapers around the world within days of the

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Silkwood case ends in victory

Kerr-McGee agrees to pay damages to family

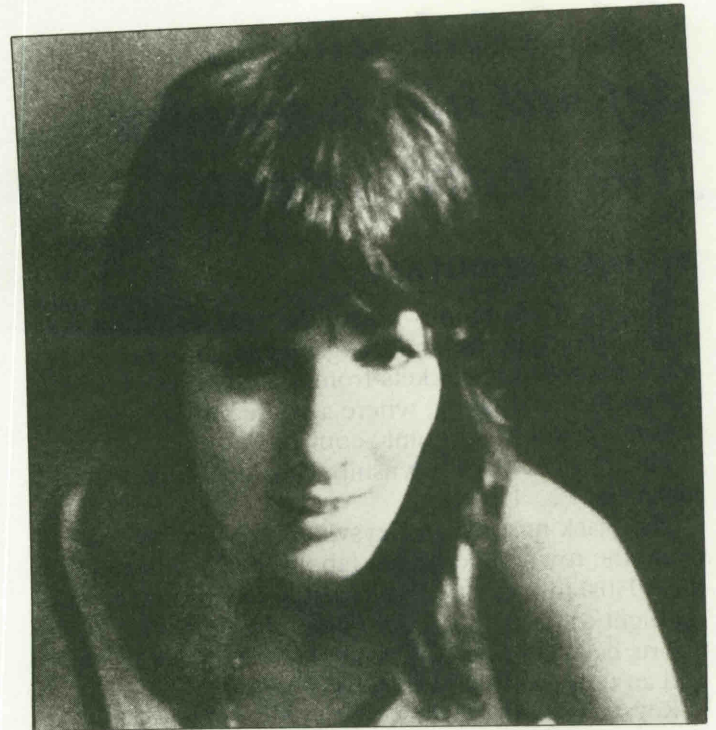
Karen Silkwood's family agreed on Aug. 22 to a \$1.38 million settlement of their lawsuit against the Kerr-McGee Nuclear Corporation.

The settlement ends a legal battle that began in 1974 when Silkwood, a union organizer at Kerr-McGee's plutonium factory in Oklahoma, died in a car crash while driving to a meeting with a reporter from *The New York Times*.

In their lawsuit against the corporation, the family charged that Kerr-McGee was responsible for Silkwood's severe contamination by plutonium discovered in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen of her home. One of the nation's leading radiation experts testified that Silkwood was already "married to cancer" before her death as the result of her exposure. The plutonium was later traced to the Kerr-McGee factory.

In 1979 a Federal jury in Oklahoma City fixed blame for the contamination on Kerr-McGee, rejecting the company's desperate attempt to prove that Silkwood maliciously irradiated herself, and in 1984 the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's right to impose punitive damages in the case.

"Karen never reached her destination that November night," said Christic Institute Executive Director Sara Nelson, "but thousands of hands reached out to finish her work.



"Her death inspired one of the great popular alliances of the 1970s and 80s, a cause that galvanized unionists, feminists, environmentalists, civil libertarians, opponents of nuclear power, and anyone who simply hated to see an injustice remain unpunished."

The Christic Institute was formed in 1979 by lawyers and investigators who organized the lawsuit against Kerr-McGee.

Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee was the first time a jury awarded damages to a victim of radiation contamination from a nuclear facility. The case established several precedents in law that protect citizens from reckless conduct by the nuclear industry:

- Courts now can award heavy punitive damages under state law even though the nuclear industry is regulated by a Federal agency, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

- The nuclear industry cannot evade damages by arguing, as Kerr-McGee did in the Silkwood case, that the radiation allowed to escape was within acceptable limits defined by the Federal Government.

- The production and handling of radioactive materials is an inherently *dangerous activity* subjecting the nuclear industry to "strict liability." If radiation causes damage or injury, the company will be liable whether or not it was negligent.

"The Institute is grateful to the many people who made the project successful," said Nelson, who launched the Silkwood campaign in 1975. "The contributions of many people have made the case and its achievements stand as a fitting memorial to the courage and dedication of Karen Silkwood, a woman who said 'No' to the nuclear industry." □

The Old South rises again

C.I. South lawyers defend black leaders from harassment

By **GAYLE KOROTKIN**

Imagine a community where the 85-percent black majority have no say in local government, where water is carried in buckets from wells because few homes have plumbing, where a white minority rules through fear and economic control.

This is not a black township in South Africa, but Keysville, Ga., U.S.A.

The black majority in Keysville have tried to reactivate the town government (abolished by whites in the 1930s) in order to obtain water, fire protection and the right to determine their community's future. Their efforts have been met by white hostility, legal barriers and an unresponsive state government.

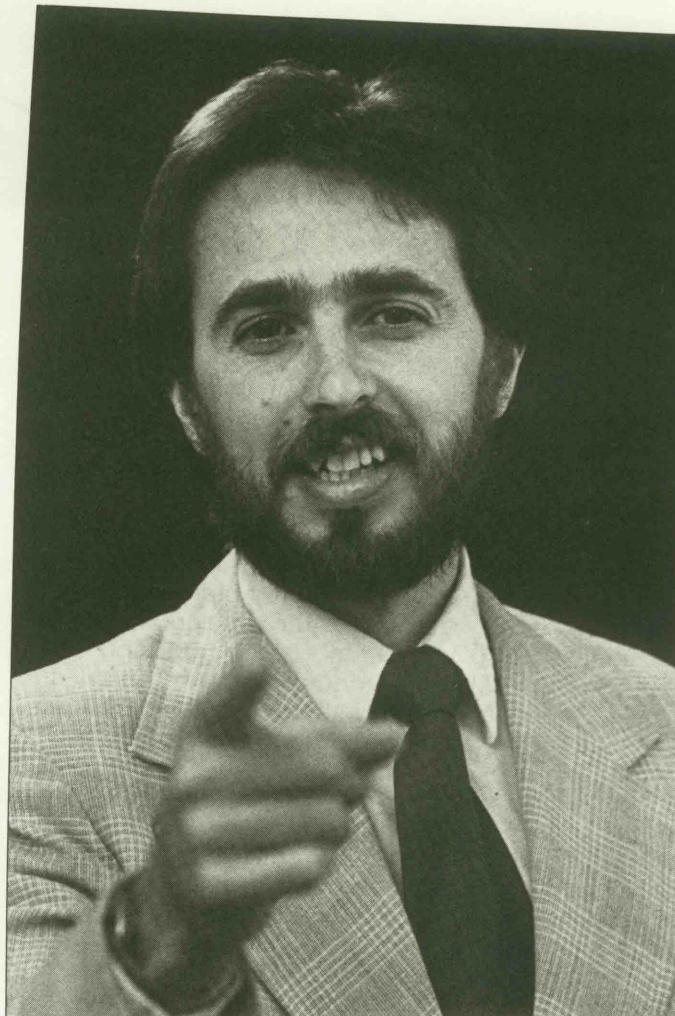
Keysville is one of the communities represented by the Christic Institute's Southern Project. The plight of the town's black residents is not exceptional. In the South it still takes courage to register and vote, to organize for labor unions and tenants' rights, to oppose toxic waste dumps in black or rural areas, to be a black or progressive elected official. In fact, the political environment has deteriorated since the Reagan Administration launched its ideological campaign against "reverse discrimination." "Trickle-down racism from Washington translates into economic reprisals, Klan terrorism and political trials," explains attorney Lewis Pitts.

Took on plantation owners

Since 1985 Pitts has headed Christic Institute South, the Institute's Southern regional office based in Chapel Hill, N.C. Christic Institute South originated in the 1982 trial of Mayor Eddie Carthan of Tchula, Miss. Carthan was the first elected black official of the small town, where blacks form the majority. "The Mayor took on the white plantation owners and brought in jobs and Federal programs," Pitts, who worked on the case, recalls. "When the white power structure couldn't buy him off, they framed him on murder charges."

The Institute worked with Carthan's counsel, a black attorney from Mississippi, to win the Mayor's acquittal after a national campaign of public education and organizing.

The Carthan victory brought appeals for help from all over the South. In the past six years of the Reagan era, the right has learned how to use the legal system. Prosecutors are using politically motivated criminal charges to harass and discredit activists and elected officials in the black community. The tactic is effective.



Wayne Lottinville

C.I. South Director Lewis Pitts: "Trickle-down racism from Washington translates into economic reprisals, Klan terrorism and political trials."

Political trials intimidate other leaders and force community organizations to pay for legal counsel, exhausting their limited financial resources.

Few lawyers are willing to take on the "Good Old Boy" power structure because dissent could endanger their political aspirations or result in a boycott of their firms. The small number of public interest law firms can barely manage to cope with the highly publicized "big" cases and cannot begin to meet the needs of less publicized cases where basic constitutional rights are threatened. The result is a vacuum in which activists become isolated and demoralized. Some go to jail for lack of legal assistance.

Works with grassroots leaders

C.I. South was organized to fill this vacuum. Since putting its first two lawyers into the field in July 1985, the Institute has worked with grassroots leaders in six Southern states, winning victories for tenants' rights,

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Institute for Southern Studies

Demonstration in South against police brutality: C.I. South defends black activists from official harassment by providing expert representation in court. In recent years the Institute has defended black elected officials and voter registrars.

voting rights and the First Amendment. For example, the Southern Project:

- reversed guilty pleas and lifted fines for 39 indigent members of a tenant organization in Louisiana who were unconstitutionally arrested during a peaceful protest march. A judge coerced the defendants, unable to afford bond, into pleading guilty. Lawyers told them they could do nothing about their guilty pleas, but C.I. South used procedures available under Louisiana law and the United States Constitution to vacate the pleas and dismiss the charges. This victory freed the tenants to resume their organizing with renewed energy.

- joined local counsel and the North Carolina Civil Liberties Union to ward off the threatened indictment on fabricated charges of an outspoken black alderman.

- worked with local counsel in Alabama to win the acquittal (from an all-white jury) of Frederick Douglass Daniels, one of eight activists in the Black Belt of Alabama indicted on Federal charges of vote fraud.

- won dismissal of charges against the Rev. Cozelle Wilson, a black minister indicted in North Carolina by state officials seeking to intimidate black voters.

Nationwide campaign to intimidate blacks

Wilson, 60, is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In 1985 the state charged

that she had "knowingly and willfully" violated state election laws when registering 205 new voters, mostly black, in rural Lenoir County. The violations were technical: The principal charge against her was that college students provided too much help in the registration campaign. No one disputes that the new voters were eligible to participate in elections.

In 1984, blacks were signed up to vote in unprecedented numbers. Local "Get Out the Vote" campaigns like Wilson's took advantage of the Voting Rights Act and other laws designed to overcome years of official harassment at the polls. "I had been knocking on doors of people who said they would never go up there to register because they had been so humiliated," Wilson said. "They were mostly older people, who have never had their names put on the book because they were denied the right to register in the past."

But 1984 was also the year of the Presidential campaign and the hotly contested race between extremist North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, a Republican, and former Gov. James Hunt, a Democrat. The Republican Party organization in North Carolina feared that the black "Get Out the Vote" campaigns could tip the balance of power in their state. According to Pitts, Wilson's indictment was part of a wider plan organized

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Politics in the end-times

Religious Right thinks God's countdown spelled out in Bible

By ANDREW LANG

In past issues of Convergence we have reported on the "Armageddon ideology" of the Religious Right. The following article, by the Institute's director of political research, is based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Although the Institute believes that the Religious Right is a grave threat to our liberties, we also believe that effective opposition to this movement is impossible unless we first understand its values and ideology. The following article describes the Religious Right's worldview without comment.

In the history of politics in the United States there have been few mass movements so completely controlled by ideology as the Religious Right. Other political sects may harbor ideologies more extreme than the doctrines of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. But the followers of these sects number in the thousands, not in the millions.

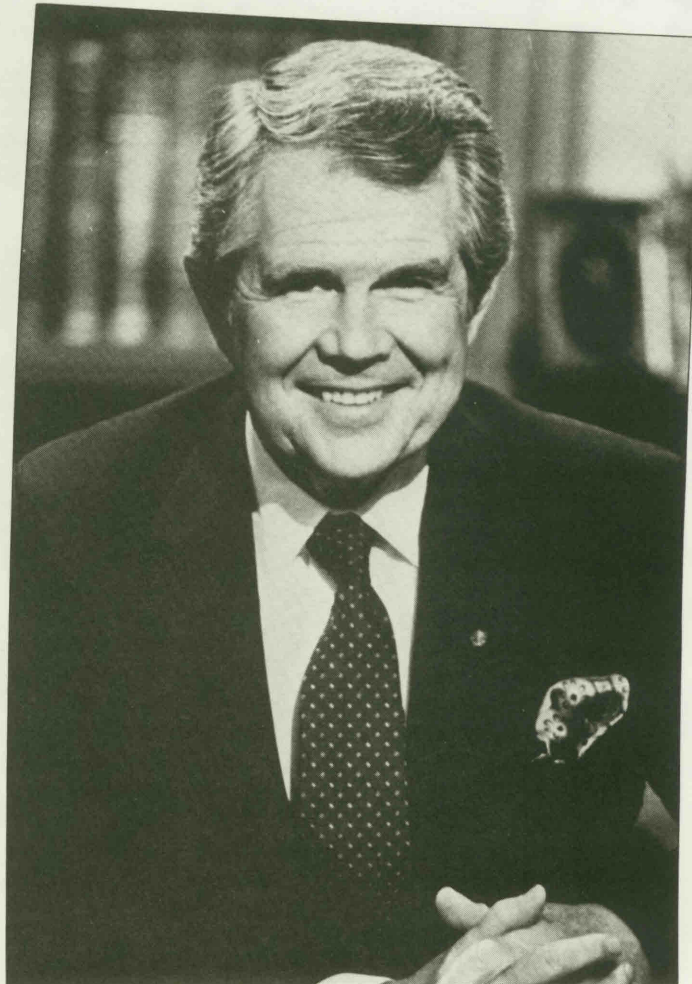
A study of the political ideology of the Religious Right is therefore in order. This is a complicated task because the Religious Right is not a monolithic movement. But the most visible personalities in this movement agree on eschatology—the doctrine of the end-time—and I will argue that eschatology is the ideological motor that drives the Religious Right's crusade for political power.

The most important eschatological system in the Religious Right is "dispensational premillennialism," an historic tradition in fundamentalist and pentecostal Christianity. Today, this tradition is one of the dominant forms of fundamentalism in the United States. Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Tim LaHaye, Oral Roberts and most of the other political pastors of the Religious Right are dispensationalists. Pat Robertson follows a variant form of premillennialism.

The Great Tribulation

Dispensational premillennialism divides history into stages, or "dispensations," from the creation of humanity to the Second Coming of Christ, and beyond. Each dispensation ends in a violent crisis between man and God. The time in which we live is the final dispensation before the Second Coming, the end-time of human history. It, too, will end in crisis: a seven-year convulsion of global warfare and economic chaos (the "Great Tribulation") reaching a savage climax in the Battle of Armageddon.

Dispensationalists believe that God's "countdown" for human history is spelled out in the Bible. They



Americans for Robertson

Pat Robertson, candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination, believes America is living in the "last days."

read the Bible as an infallible history book dictated by the Holy Spirit to prophets and apostles. But it is a history book about the future as well as the past. Consequently, succeeding generations of dispensationalists have searched the daily newspaper for "signs of the times." In the world wars and revolutions of this century, they have seen evidence of the coming end-times chaos described in Bible prophecy. Today, the theorists of Armageddon interpret the rise of Soviet power and the nuclear war danger as key indicators that the Great Tribulation is about to begin.

The Great Tribulation is Satan's last desperate gamble for power. As he seizes control of nations and churches, the world plunges into a war crisis. This crisis precipitates the destruction of political and religious systems, including the Soviet empire.

The deadliest catastrophes of the Tribulation period will center on Israel. Sometime within the next fifty years, Jerry Falwell believes, Soviet forces will invade the Middle East and meet their doom "on the moun-

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