

A Conspiracy Behind Peoples Temple Expose?



Attorney Charles Garry

by Art Silverman

Is the current two-month barrage of sensational charges levelled against San Francisco's Peoples Temple "an organized, orchestrated, premeditated government campaign to destroy a politically-progressive organization," as Temple attorney Charles Garry accuses? Or is it a "spontaneous, courageous action by a group of former Temple members, who never came forward before because they were scared to death (of reprisals)," the explanation offered by Rosalie Muller Wright, senior editor of New West magazine, which first published and has since supported the accusations? There still aren't any definitive answers to those questions -- or to the specific allegations of fraud, deceit, real estate swindles and physical brutality raised in numerous media accounts since publication of the first of two New West articles in mid-July (see Barb, July 22).

But a number of unusual circumstances and coincidences can't help but raise the suspicion that there's more going on than first meets the eye. For example:

*A Barb investigation has revealed that one individual working behind the scenes to discredit Peoples Temple is a San Francisco private investigator, who somehow managed to obtain a state investigator's license after being released from prison in 1976.

Joseph A. Mazor, the detective, has a lengthy criminal record including at least eight arrests in three states for various bogus check and fraud charges, six convictions, several jail and prison terms, and has been returned to confinement three times for violating probation and parole by committing new crimes.

A confidential, 16-page California Adult Authority report on Mazor, written in 1970, was recently obtained by the Barb. "(He) is a smooth 'con-man' with an insatiable desire to get ahead," concludes the report. "He is bright, well-educated, and so well-versed in the law that he had five attorneys in the Pomona area convinced that he had a law degree."

"It is felt that the subject is a menace to the community."

Mazor has admitted to the Barb that he was first employed to investigate the Peoples Temple in November 1976, eight months before publication of the first New West article. But he refuses to say who retained him.

"I'm not going to tell you that," said Mazor, though he did reveal that his employer was an outsider, and not a past or present member of Peoples Temple. Mazor said he is currently employed by "several" former Temple members, including Elmer and Deanna Merrile, the original sources for the New West ar-

ticles. "Mazor apparently is not only investigating Peoples Temple, but also actively seeking publicity to discredit the organization."

To that end, the Barb has learned, Mazor hired one of the largest public relations firms in San Francisco and then asked them to coordinate a public campaign against the Temple and its minister, Reverend Jim Jones.

Bob Kenney, an account executive at Lowry, Russon and Leeper, confirmed for the Barb that he has been working for Mazor "on this (Peoples Temple) project, showing him how to handle the media." He referred further inquiries to Mazor himself, whose only comment on Kenney's role was, "I don't think that's any of your business."

Mazor did note that he originally hired the public relations firm to help him attract business from insurance companies, and then the Peoples Temple matter just came up, and so naturally I turned to them for help.

But a source close to Lowry, Russon and Leeper told the Barb that Mazor came to the company "saying that he wanted to become San Francisco's next Hal Lipset (a famous investigator)," and that the Peoples Temple controversy "presented an excellent opportunity" to garner publicity.

According to this source, Kenney's work for Mazor included sending out letters to selected journalists, offering them --



Temple leader Rev. Jim Jones



Indian leader Dennis Banks says he was asked to denounce Rev. Jim Jones.

through Mazor -- exclusive material of an incriminating nature, against Peoples Temple.

Kenney's campaign resulted in at least one article in the San Francisco Chronicle last month, concerning an alleged tape-recording of a telephone conversation, in which Temple members supposedly discussed irregularities of the rotary telephone accounts "transferring bills of a member's home" to the Temple. The allegations raised in that story are now also in dispute.

In another strange twist to the Peoples Temple story, American Indian Movement leader Dennis Banks charged recently that he was approached on March 23 by a man who identified himself "as working with the Treasury Department, with an Internal Revenue Service agent, and with two men from the San Francisco Police Department."

The man, who Banks and his associate Lehman Brightman identified as David Conn, then allegedly offered Banks help with his extradition problems in exchange for "a public denunciation" of Jim Jones. Banks is facing possible extradition from California to South Dakota.

Banks has long been a Peoples Temple supporter, and has attended Temple services three or four times. The Temple also made a loan of \$19,000 to bail Bank's wife out of prison last year. Her charges were subsequently dropped and the money was returned.

Conn was obviously making a deal with me," Banks charged in a sworn affidavit presented at a press conference earlier this month. "I was being blackmailed."

"These agents all knew that I had a lot hanging over me. Besides the extradition, I also had a case in Federal court in which the Treasury Department was involved. I have often made it clear that if I am extradited to South Dakota, that is like a sentence of death, because I am certain I will be killed there."

Banks also quoted Conn as saying that he has been investigating Peoples Temple for seven years, and was working with several ex-members, including Grace Slocum, who turned out to be another source for the New West articles.

When reached by the Barb this week, Conn admitted that he has been investigating Peoples Temple for seven years, but said that he had undertaken the project on his own, as a private matter, "because I became aware that this is one of the worst religious frauds being perpetrated. This man is ripping off the black people."

Conn also admitted that he sought out Dennis Banks and arranged a meeting, but his version of what transpired on March 23 was notably different. "I wanted to talk to Banks because I

respect the guy, and I was afraid that he was going to discredit himself through his association with Peoples Temple, without really knowing what they were about."

Conn, a survivor employed by the Standard Oil Corporation, denies that he ever mentioned Banks' extradition or offered him any deals. He claims that he only mentioned the Treasury Department and other government agencies in passing, pointing out to Banks that they were conducting their own investigations of Reverend Jones and the Temple.

In fact, Conn said, it was he and Santa Rosa freelance journalist George Klineman who approached various police and governmental agencies last fall, offering them witnesses and documents with which to attack the Temple. No investigations were underway before that time.

Both George Klineman and David Conn also have connections to the New West articles -- Klineman was credited with helping write the stories, while Conn was a secondary source and appeared at a New West-sponsored press conference held at the Sheraton Palace Hotel July 20 to help promote the articles.

In addition, Conn is a close personal friend of the Merriles; the main sources for much anti-Temple publicity. By his own admission, Conn was investigating the Temple during all the years that his friends the Merriles were members.

It is also the Merriles who hired private eye Mazor and retained San Francisco attorney Daniel Deneberg to file a law suit against the Temple.

But nobody has been served with legal papers yet, and so for the moment there is still no way to get witnesses on the stand, under oath, to try to get at the truth about Peoples Temple once and for all.

Jim Jones is still in Guyana, where he has remained since before publication of the first anti-Temple articles on attorney Garry's orders. According to reports from Guyana, relayed by Garry, there have been two attempts on Jones' life in the last month, one staged by "three white people with guns" who came onto the Temple's 5000-acre mission.

The Dennis Banks press conference, held in Garry's downtown San Francisco office, marks the first time that Temple officials have made any comment about the various charges raised by New West and other media.

But they are still refusing to respond concretely to any particular accusations, on the grounds that they still don't know who is responsible for these attacks.

"We're going to keep our mouths shut," said attorney Garry, "until the dust settles and we get to the bottom of this. It looks like a conspiracy to me."

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