

The New Femmes Fatales - A Mayan Holy Man Speaks

# MOTHER JONES

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## Contragate: It's Not Over Yet

Controversial lawyer  
Danny Sheehan puts  
Secord, Singlaub and the  
"Secret Team" on trial.  
Is his case built on fact?



# MOTHER JONES

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by James Traub

Lawyer Danny Sheehan of the Christic Institute has become a hot item on the Left: in a tone blending '60s politics and '70s theology, he says that a "Secret Team" of spies, smugglers, and killers has run U.S. foreign policy for 25 years. He's about to put the team—and his own view of the world—on trial.

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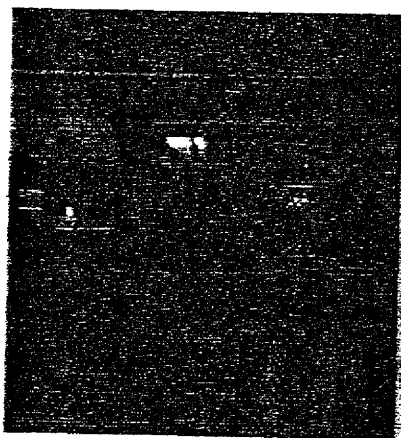
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# The LAW and the PROPHET

By James Traub

*Charismatic, controversial Danny Sheehan  
says he's found Conragate's spooks.  
He's about to put them on trial.*

**I**t was not so very long ago, as Danny Sheehan likes to recall, that you couldn't even point out that private international phone traffic was monitored by the U.S. government without being regarded as a left-wing nut. Most Americans took it for granted that the state acted in accordance with law—even if bad law—and declared principle. Then came Vietnam, and Watergate, and congressional hearings into the dark brotherhood of the CIA, and, finally, that blooming, burgeoning disaster known as Iran-contra. Now we know that we knew nothing. Patriotic congressmen, staggering out of the Iran-contra hearings, have spoken of a secret government, a bloodless coup, as if the great game of power were being played out on a stage we couldn't even see. Someone has been trampling on our cher-

Photographs by Michelle Vignes



ished democracy—but who? Oliver North? William Casey? Ronald Reagan himself?

Or was it, as lawyer, investigator, orator, and one-time divinity student Danny Sheehan says, the Secret Team?

Polling organizations haven't yet bothered to count, but it's clear that tens of thousands of Americans now believe Danny Sheehan when he says that Theodore Shackley and Thomas Clines and Richard Secord and John Singlaub and Rafael "Chi Chi" Quintero and several dozen other, even more obscure individuals—the group Sheehan calls the Secret Team—have commanded that unseen stage. With and without government approval, Sheehan argues, the Secret Team has, for 25 years, supplied weapons as well as its unique assassination services to destroy Communist and Socialist movements in Cuba, Southeast Asia, Iran and the Middle East, and, latterly, Nicaragua. The Secret Team is the nightmare of the American

Left come to life. "These are the real superideologues," says Sheehan, the 42-year-old founder of the Christic Institute in Washington, D.C. "This is the seat of power. As Ross Perot said to me, 'As long as these men are in power, it's not clear that any man can call himself president.'"

*Ross Perot?* What in the world is Ross Perot, the Reverend Pat Robertson's professed candidate for secretary of defense, doing in the middle of a left-wing nightmare? Perot isn't quite sure himself. He says that he's met with Sheehan several times and put him in touch with FBI officials, but that's all. "I'm concerned that Danny is using me in some way that I don't understand," says Perot. But Ross Perot is part of the Danny Sheehan mystique, a guide into the heart of darkness where Sheehan, a stocky man with a lantern jaw, a dense nest of curly gray hair, and glittering eyes, has gone prospecting for strange truth. When Sheehan starts unplugging and replugging the phone in his office to keep his conversation from being tapped, you know he's talking to one of the voices from the darkness: a former torturer from Savak, a drug courier, a U.S. military investigator. "He's an Irish storyteller," says Father Bill Davis, a Christic investigator and Catholic priest. "He has that capacity for intrigue and inspiration."

And, a few gimlet-eyed skeptics add, blarney. Not even a few, actually; a lot. Ask these journalists, experts, Capitol Hill investigators, and former CIA agents, many of whom are sympathetic to Danny Sheehan's general critique of covert operations, and they will tell you that his gorgeous tapestry is woven of rumor and half-truth and wish-fulfillment. In Danny Sheehan they see a man in whom passion has overcome reason. And they are extremely worried. "If it's exposed that there are no sources, or no solid sources," says one expert on intelligence issues, "the Right will jump on that and use it as a paintbrush to smear everyone opposed to contra aid."

These demurrals have hindered Danny Sheehan's progress about as effectively as brickbats slow a tank attack. Sheehan and the Christic Institute have stitched together, and are now pursuing, a massive civil conspiracy suit against 29 members of the alleged group (none of whom currently serve in the U.S. government). The suit, filed in Federal District Court in Miami, alleges "a pattern of racketeering activity" including "acts or threats of murder, kidnapping, bribery, and the felonious manufacture, importation, selling, and otherwise dealing in cocaine and proscribed drugs." (Many of the defendants have publicly and repeatedly denied the charges.) The trial is scheduled for this summer.

At present Sheehan and his colleagues at the nonprofit Christic Institute, together with a group of about 50 professional trial lawyers working on a pro bono basis, are taking sworn depositions from ex-CIA operatives Shackley and Clines, as well as from Edwin P. Wilson, the notorious ex-spook who got caught selling arms to Muammar Qaddafi; Cuban-American veterans of the anti-Castro campaign; Colombian drug smugglers; and contra civilian leaders—300 in all. Think about it for a second. Men who have lived in the perfect darkness of "black" operations will have to sit in an auditorium full of journalists—that's how Sheehan would like to do it, anyway—and talk about the guns, the drugs, the killing. They will be compelled to hand over—to a bunch of undernourished lefty-types—their bank and telephone records, their credit card receipts. The visceral satisfaction alone will be incredible, as if Danny Sheehan were enacting a ritual of revenge for every citizen who raged at the covert operations and dirty tricks of the last generation. And if Danny Sheehan and Christic go on to win the suit, the Secret Team will have to cough up as much as \$22 million.

THESE DAYS, DANNY SHEEHAN CANNOT POSSIBLY KEEP up with demands for his appearance, though he swings through several cities every month, as does his wife and co-worker, Sara Nelson. The speeches not only satisfy the prophetic impulse to spread the gospel, but help raise the staggering \$40,000 a week needed to keep the case going. Sheehan started off the last day of a recent three-day blitz of Boston with a radio call-in show and a press conference.



*Danny Sheehan on the Secret Team:*

*"This is the seat of power."*

Only six or seven people showed up at the press conference, but Sheehan talked on and on and on; he doesn't need an audience. Then he raced off to address a human rights class at Harvard Law School, his alma mater of 1970. Sheehan began his speech to the crowd of callow lawyers-to-be by recalling vignettes from his own remarkable legal career—hammering out tactics with Floyd Abrams in the Pentagon Papers case, weeping with helplessness on the steps of Attica before finally gaining access to the prison and its 41 fresh corpses, Wounded Knee, Karen Silkwood, the Klan case in Greensboro, the sanctuary movement. He unrolled the harrowing story of the Secret Team, and accused his law school listeners of trooping off to Wall Street at a time when the Constitution is in mortal peril. And then Sheehan closed—as he almost always does—to a standing ovation. Down the aisles went the index cards, and back they came, dozens of them, with offers of help for Danny Sheehan.



*Danny Sheehan—public-interest lawyer, missionary, man with the bullhorn, star of a video shown at thousands of house parties, darling of L.A. liberals—tells stories with a beginning, a middle, an end, and a clear moral.*

The campus crusade for Christic was swelling.

That evening a crowd of perhaps 750 jammed the pews and camped beyond the doors of St. Paul's Episcopal Church to hear Danny Sheehan's Secret Team gospel. The religious symbolism was almost embarrassingly profuse: Sheehan stood beneath a massive gold cross suspended from St. Paul's ceiling. Mighty organ pipes flanked him on either side. A strong light shone down on the curly-haired man in the tan corduroy suit and the sort of aggressively ugly tie that tells the '80s to go to hell. Sheehan spoke without notes, without hesitation, in the grand rolling periods of the preacher and the rabble-rouser. He invoked the collective memory of the '60s, when the fine ideals of young people poised to greet a bright new world were battered by "the slaughter of a young president, the slaughter of his brother, the slaughter of Martin Luther King." Sheehan declared the collapse of the Reagan era "offensive." "It is time," he said, his voice hoarse after three days of nonstop public speaking, "for our counteroffensive to begin." The crowd thundered back.

Understand this: Danny Sheehan had come not to speak of the crimes of 29 men, but of the world of evil that spawned them, and of the possibility of renewal through a great commitment. And as the crowd settled in, Danny

Sheehan, Irish stem-winder and virtuoso of the conspiracy theory, launched into his stump speech—the horrifying and absolutely thrilling tale of the Secret Team.

The events leading up to the Christic Institute's lawsuit began May 30, 1984, at a press conference—called by dissident contra leader Eden Pastora—in La Penca, in the jungle of southern Nicaragua. In a videotape, Sheehan told the crowd at St. Paul's, you can see a supposed Danish journalist—in fact, Sheehan claimed, a Lebanese contract killer—place his camera case next to Pastora's lectern, and then sidle out the door. "About three minutes later," Sheehan continued in his oddly flat cadence, "a horrendous explosion blows up the press conference and slaughters eight different people. . . . Two dozen other people are seriously maimed, lose legs and arms and eyes and hearing." One of the severely wounded was television cameraman Tony Avirgan, whose wife, free-lance journalist Martha Honey, launched an investigation of the explosion with the help of the U.S. Newspaper Guild. In the fall of 1985 Avirgan and Honey alleged that the La Penca bombing had been plotted and executed by a group including American mercenaries and expatriate ranchers, contra leader Adolfo Calero, Cuban-American assassins, and Colombian drug lords. Their claims were greeted with dis-

belief by the mainstream press and a libel suit from rancher John Hull, a pivotal member of the alleged conspiracy.

Sheehan, meanwhile, had been hearing stories from his network of sources about a group of "Soldier of Fortune-types" and right-wing expatriates who were smuggling U.S. weaponry to the contras. "Extremely well informed investigative reporters"—Sheehan didn't say who—told him that "a young lieutenant colonel by the name of Oliver North was functioning through a private citizen named Robert Owen to be liaison to the private smuggling systems." That, Sheehan told his listeners, was a violation of the Neutrality Act and the Boland Amendment and arms export control regulations.

Sheehan had the crime for a civil suit; now he needed a victim. And in the fall of 1985, when he heard about the La Penca bombing, which involved the same gang of mercenaries and ranchers and Cuban-Americans he had been investigating, he began to smell the civil suit of a lifetime. Christic, which had been established five years earlier to pursue public interest litigation, took on Hull's libel suit and defeated it decisively. John Hull, he told the crowd at St. Paul's, "grumbled and got up from the courtroom and moved to the courtroom door and turned and snarled, 'This isn't over yet.' And little did he know how right he was." As Sheehan savored these last few words, the church rocked with laughter.

Soon afterward, said Sheehan, "a former military intelligence officer"—also unnamed—contacted Christic with the claim that the man behind the supply of weaponry to John Hull's ranch "was *not* Oliver North, was *not* [mercenary] Tom Posey, wasn't even just Bill Casey, but in fact was a man named Theodore Shackley, the assistant deputy director of covert operations for the Central Intelligence Agency worldwide under George Bush." It was then that Danny Sheehan began to peer into the heart of darkness that was the Secret Team. Christic investigator David MacMichael likes to jokingly refer to Shackley as "Professor Moriarty," but Danny Sheehan's sense of humor does not extend that far. To Sheehan, Shackley is the malevolent puppetmaster of the Secret Team, a "certified genius" whom Sheehan does not hesitate to compare to Adolf Eichmann. Sheehan began to follow the traces of his nemesis backward to the early days of the cold war.

The crowd at St. Paul's had grown deathly silent. In 1965, Sheehan continued, after several years running the CIA's secret Cuban-American terrorist squad in Miami, Shackley, with his ever-present deputy, Thomas Clines, was sent to Laos to organize opposition to the Pathet Lao guerrilla force. With the assistance of Clines, Richard Secord, and John Singlaub, Shackley recruited the Meo hill tribesmen into a dirty war of monumental proportions. The group "secretly assassinated over 100,000 noncombatant village mayors, bookkeepers, clerks, and other civilian bureaucrats," according to the affidavit the Christic Institute submitted to the court in December of 1986.

The existence of the CIA team, known as the Special Operations Group, has been well documented, as has its connection to opium traffickers. But Sheehan made the

additional claim that Shackley largely funded the effort with kickbacks from opium warlord Vang Pao, whom he had set up in business. Fifteen years later, Sheehan told the throng at St. Paul's. Shackley was to pull off the same trick in Central America, financing the purchase of weapons for the contras by providing John Hull's ranch as a transshipment point for tons of cocaine moving from Colombia to the United States.

The United States finally pulled out of Southeast Asia, but Theodore Shackley, Sheehan insisted, did not. In 1973, with the war winding down and Senator Frank Church's Select Committee on Intelligence preparing to investigate CIA dirty tricks, Shackley, then the agency's station chief in Saigon, had, according to Sheehan, "seen the writing on the wall" and begun to assemble his private war machine with millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons siphoned off from the war effort. Shackley would become the field marshal of a private anti-Communist army—"an off-the-shelf, off-the-books covert operational capacity."

In the years that followed, Sheehan claimed, this army ranged across the face of the earth—to Iran as the Shah was tottering, to the Middle East, to the Philippines, to Somoza's Nicaragua. And finally, Sheehan said, it was Theodore Shackley, and Clines and Secord and Albert Hakim and the Cuban-American killers, and their maze of private companies, who were selected by the Reagan administration to carry out the arms sales to Iran and then shuffle the proceeds until the money wound up in the hands of the contras. These team members were, after all, uniquely qualified.

About an hour had passed in the hush of St. Paul's. Other than a few bursts of laughter, the only sound had been the occasional collective gasp as Danny Sheehan conjured out of his hat yet another strange and troubling rabbit. Sheehan closed by calling for "the same kind of fervor" that rocked the establishment in the '60s. Inside the church, that fervor—that blend of outrage and commitment—seemed almost palpable. As Sheehan walked off the stage, the crowd—many of them early-middle-aged veterans of past political wars—rose in salute, huzzahs, thunderous applause. Danny Sheehan nodded shyly in acknowledgment.

THE CHRISTIC INSTITUTE OPERATES OUT OF THREE cramped, cluttered row houses in the slums of northeast Washington—an oasis of fresh paint and hectic activity surrounded by idle men camping out on stoops. No one has joined Christic for the money: a number of the founders have lived for years in a group house, and Sheehan and Nelson pay themselves, and almost everyone else at Christic, \$15,000 each. The merry young soldiers—and they *are* young—seem to live on greasy Chinese takeout, which they consume on the fly in the combined kitchen/photocopy and collating office.

Think of Christic, then, as one of those early outposts of Christianity, say in Smyrna, when the gospel was beginning to advance. The shabby digs are suffused with a sense of destiny and high purpose—of "unfinished business," as

assistant general counsel Lanny Sinkin puts it. The founders and principals emerged from the '60s with their purity intact. They sincerely believe that the world is finally coming around. They are men and women of faith, in humanity if not necessarily in God. The denominational-sounding name comes from Teilhard de Chardin, the early-20th-century Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist, who wrote of a "Christic" principle that binds together all things in the universe.

Teilhard believed in man's spiritual evolution. So does Danny Sheehan. It takes a while to notice Sheehan's spiritual side, since he's so enthralled by darkness and huggermugger, and possibly also because he calls people he doesn't like "assholes." Most of the time Sheehan sounds like the guy with the bullhorn at an SDS rally. But this not-quite-lapsed Catholic is almost as drawn to spiritual mysteries as to secular ones. Talking with visitors in his sparse office while the phone rings and aides bustle in and out, Sheehan can execute a sudden jump cut from the "national security state bureaucracy" to the corrosive effects of a materialist culture—from one monologue to another. Modern man, he says, in the matter-of-fact tone in which he delivers all large truths, is "alienated from the godhead, alone in the cosmos beneath this awesome sky of stars. We're afraid. We're seized by this cosmic angst and fear." But this is not a digression. With Danny Sheehan, everything is connected to everything else. "The major opponent of the national security state is the religious consciousness. Otherwise the people are left untreated in their anxiety and their fear." More than an investigative reporter or a lawyer, Danny Sheehan is a missionary. That unsettling glitter in his eye is the sign of the quest.

Oddly enough, Sheehan seems to have been intended by nature to be a happy, self-satisfied jock. He grew up in bucolic Warrensburg, in upstate New York, played football, and dreamed of becoming an astronaut. He applied for enrollment at the Air Force Academy. As the number one candidate in his congressional district, Sheehan expected

to be nominated for a slot by his local representative. Instead, the opening went to number seven on the list, whose father was the mayor of neighboring Glens Falls—Sheehan's first experience with political injustice. After enrolling at Northeastern University, Sheehan joined the elite corps of ROTC, training to be a Green Beret. This was 1964, when being a Green Beret was still something like being a starting football player.

Picture Danny Sheehan as a fair-haired, square-jawed,

small-town boy, bubbling with energy and idealism. He and his ROTC squad were taken to a military base to learn how to kill the enemy with a piano-wire garrote. Sheehan gets so excited recalling this revelatory moment that he practically falls down on one knee to demonstrate technique. "Remember," the officer told Sheehan and his team of innocent jocks, "this is not a class one killer because it's not totally silent, because you cut the head off and it will fall on the ground. And remember also, this gore will shoot out of their neck," and you'll have to wash or "Charlie'll smell you layin' in the weeds." I said, "Either they're totally nuts or I'm totally nuts for being here, and I'm not nuts so I'm leaving." And they're all yelling, "Sheehan, you asshole, get back here!" And I said, "Fuck you, I'm leaving."

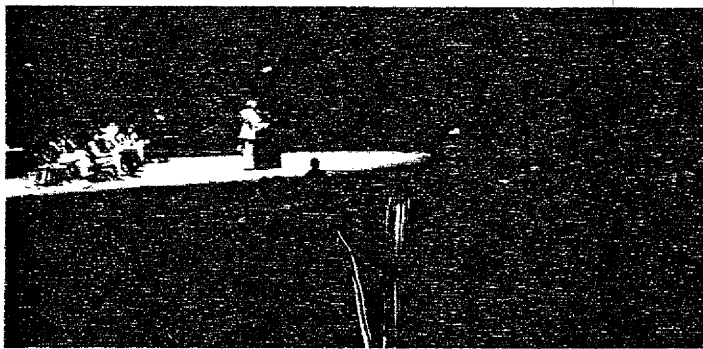
And he walked into the '60s, into the caldron of Harvard College and Harvard Law. Everyone was popping magic mushrooms and studying Zen and speaking words of wisdom and generally "seeking out some kind of dialogue with the spiritual realm." Sheehan told his draft board to go to hell, and when his deferment was revoked he threatened to tell the world what his Green Beret trainers had told him—that he would be killing noncombatants in Vietnam. The draft board relented, Sheehan says, and he finished law school and went off, incongruously enough, to the Wall Street law firm of Cahill, Gordon & Reindel.

The draft board story is like all Danny Sheehan stories, with a beginning, a middle, an end, and a shinningly clear moral. The structure makes the stories appealing; it also sometimes makes them sound too good to be true. Sheehan loves to tell about that

stint at Cahill, Gordon, when he, Floyd Abrams, Alexander Bickel, and two or three others defended the *New York Times* in the Pentagon Papers case and bearded the lion of Nixonian secrecy. That's not quite how Abrams recalls it. Sheehan, Abrams says, was one of 12 lawyers working on the case, and, though "very actively involved," was still a junior associate doing research work. It is "not untrue," Abrams says, that Sheehan was

later fired from the firm for ignoring private litigation for public interest work; but it is "wholly false" that Sheehan, as he also likes to boast, was only the second attorney so honored. The first, Danny Sheehan would like you to know, was Alger Hiss.

Over the next few years Sheehan enrolled at Harvard Divinity School to study ethics, left to litigate the Wounded Knee case for the American Civil Liberties Union, returned to the realm of the spirit at Harvard's Episcopal



### *Danny Sheehan on modern life:*

*"We are alone in the cosmos."*

Theological Seminary, and left before being called to the clergy in order to serve as general counsel to the Jesuits' Office of Social Ministry in Washington. By now he was a veteran agitator and public-interest lawyer, and the National Organization for Women hired him to litigate the Karen Silkwood case. Here Sheehan began to perfect his unorthodox methods, mounting a costly investigation with professional gumshoes, trading information with reporters, paddling through layers of secrecy. Sheehan encountered a loose network of former intelligence officials with high government contacts. When he probed too deeply he found his inquiries suddenly stifled. He glimpsed the dim outlines of a conspiracy. No one ever managed to piece it all together, but Danny Sheehan concluded that Karen Silkwood was killed because she had stumbled on the clandestine theft of nuclear fuel. The Silkwood family eventually accepted a settlement of nearly \$1.4 million from the Kerr-McGee Corporation, which the family had accused of negligence and inadequate safety measures. The story had a beginning, a middle, an end, and a moral.

The Silkwood case made a good movie. The Iran-contra story, as Sara Nelson says, "is many movies." This helps explain why the public has been so baffled and troubled by the revelations of the past year—all that cosmic angst and fear. No one has even been able to come up with a satisfactory name for this bizarre sequence of events, which stretches from the Ayatollah's key-shaped cake to Swiss bank accounts to Robert Owen's heroic couplets on the plight of the contras. Indeed, the events of Iran-contra, unlike Watergate, lack not only a catchy name but a coherent narrative and a resonant meaning—what in literature would be called a "mythos."

The Christic Institute has sought to fill this psychic void. With its head in the visionary realm of '60s politics and '70s theology, and its feet scrabbling in the muck of plots and lies and violent death, the Christic Institute was supremely equipped, and perhaps predisposed, to create the Iran-contra mythos. And this largely explains why the Christic Institute has gone from being one of the yapping spaniels of progressive activism to a national phenomenon with 60 employees, a \$2 million budget, and tens of thousands of devoted followers. As Sara Nelson recalls, "We had one person stand up in the audience and say, 'I'm so grateful. You know, I've known for 25 years that something wasn't right, and I couldn't figure out what was going on, and I thought I would die before I ever understood.'" The Secret Team theory supplied what people yearned for—not facts, but meaning.

This brings us to the nagging question that scores of people have asked, and that Sheehan and his colleagues have tried, with no success at all, to shrug off: has Christic been so avid in its pursuit of meaning that it has trifled with the facts? The critics—many of whom share Sheehan's distaste for the national security apparatus—point to errors in the 1986 affidavit, as well as to Sheehan's stubborn refusal to identify the sources upon whom the lawsuit rests. Sheehan had withheld the names even from Judge James Lawrence King until mid-December of 1987, when King

threatened to dismiss the suit unless defense lawyers were given access to Christic's sources.

Sheehan's critics are no less troubled by his flair for the dramatic. Of course, Sheehan's hyperbole and melodrama may be taken as legal posturing, designed to drum up publicity, impress the judge with the gravity of the charges, and intimidate the defendants. And Sheehan doesn't have to be right about everything: a jury in a civil suit need only be convinced that 51 percent of the evidence lies on the plaintiff's side in order to award damages.

Yet this defense clearly won't do. The Secret Team theory has taken on virtually canonical status as Sheehan and Nelson have circulated it around the country. As part of its high-intensity marketing campaign, the Christic Institute has distributed a videotape of Sheehan delivering his Secret Team rap. In Minneapolis alone, says Sara Nelson, there have been over 1,500 house parties featuring the cassette. Entertainment industry progressives, led by Jackson Browne and Don Henley, have inspired Southern Californians to contribute \$250,000 to Christic. The Secret Team theory, for better or worse, is fast becoming the official explanation of the Iran-contra events in progressive circles around the country.

Several journalists who have looked into Christic's allegations praise Sheehan for uncovering new sources in Miami, and, back when the very idea seemed ludicrous, for daring to accuse Richard Secord, Robert Owen, Oliver North, and others of waging a secret war in Nicaragua. Sheehan's supporters include Leslie Cockburn, a producer on CBS's *West 57th Street* and author of the recent book *Out of Control*, and investigative reporter Dennis Bernstein, who says, "I characterize Sheehan as 60-40. Sixty percent is true enough to investigate. Out of that 60, you can find 30 that is earth-shattering." Perhaps the errors, the other 40, should be discounted as the inevitable consequence of Sheehan's insistence on the global view. "When history books are written," says Anne Zill, a prominent backer of liberal causes, "the fact that he has a far-reaching vision will be more appreciated than it is today."

Or perhaps he will be a forgotten crank. While the rest of the progressive world is out fighting the Reagan administration's cult of covert operations and military expansionism, Danny Sheehan is pursuing Theodore Shackley like Captain Ahab with his great white whale. Sheehan doesn't even like talking about the need to reform the CIA, since "one of the most damaging things to do in a public policy lawsuit is to infuse the lawsuit with a prejudicial political point of view." A number of critics think that Sheehan is thus diverting attention from what counts. "It's fun to punish Ted Shackley and Thomas Clines and Richard Secord," says critic of the intelligence establishment and former intelligence agent John Stockwell. "But Theodore Shackley was only one of the top 300 officers in the agency. Shackley is not the problem. The problem is with the policy of covert operations."

And then there is the question of whether the Secret Team conspiracy exists only in Danny Sheehan's vivid imagination. Susan Morgan, a (Continued on page 46)



arms; Sam had AIDS, too. He listened patiently to my monologue about Millie and Tommy, and the description of Rick's belief in the Darwinist discipline of self-healing. Then he described Tommy as he'd known him: beautiful, self-effacing, gentle, always ready to party, usually on someone else's tab. Sam said he owed Tommy, because he had denied his own disease until he saw Tommy in the hospital with IVs draining into his arm. Sam didn't care about Tommy's attitude; it was the same now as it had always been. He was disgusted that Tommy had been abandoned (and, from then on, made sure that Tommy's dinner was delivered every night). I kept shaking and going on about how complicated everything had become, and Sam would put his arm around me, saying things would be fine. This kindness was almost unbearable because I thought how ironic it was that he was giving strength to me.

Sam looked around the bar and pointed out the men he fancied. He gazed at a husky man across from us and said, "I wouldn't throw him out of bed for eating crackers!" We laughed; I was glad to see desire alive in him. Sam, still in his 20s, was thin, neither handsome nor ugly, with an intense manner. When he was diagnosed the doctors recommended he go to the Mental Health Clinic for counseling. He went only once. "I'm sorry. That isn't living to me." He preferred to smoke and drink and flirt. He was still working, though he guessed that once his bosses realized he had AIDS they'd find an excuse to fire him. It had already happened to one of his colleagues. Another colleague with AIDS was still working and struggling to hide his disease, though it was affecting his balance such that he sometimes appeared drunk. If Sam was fired he wasn't sure what he'd do, since he had no insurance or savings and his family was poor.

AIDS raises so many questions that we shouldn't have to answer; Sam apparently had discovered how to not need answers, or even the questions themselves. I desperately wanted to gain something of that assurance for myself, or at least for Millie and Tommy, who needed it. I remembered how many times I'd come back to our room to find Millie on the sofa with a drink, staring at the wall, trying to escape the heat—and Tommy, a few blocks away, his TV set speaking aimlessly.

Around 2 A.M., after an extended gossip session about his ex-lovers, Sam and I left Papillon's and wandered dimly homeward through the empty streets. By this time my wearisome confusion about Tommy had played itself out. There was only a sort of lingering teariness. Sam had run out of things to say as well. He smiled. "One last cigarette." We sat on a white stone wall,

savoring the coolness of night, and talked about how much we liked Millie. Sam stood up; we put our arms around each other and kept from crying. He pointed to the sky and said, "Look, the moon. And a star." Beneath it was a gas station and an ice machine in fluorescent light. For once, Key West managed to appear beautiful.

*A week after I left Key West, Frank discovered he had AIDS antibodies. Sam went north to undergo radiation treatments. Rick had a slight relapse and found his positive attitude collapsing; he didn't feel like being strong or cooking his own meals anymore. Rick talked about this with Tommy, who said, "Maybe now you can understand what I've been going through." Tommy was diagnosed as having "wasting syndrome," which meant that his body was passing food without extracting nourishment. He was readmitted to the hospital and Hal joined Millie in Key West. A few weeks later Tommy died, with Millie beside him.*

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## CHRISTIC

(Continued from page 26) British television reporter and La Penca victim currently assembling a documentary on the bombing, says that after months of investigation she has been unable to corroborate any of Christic's claims. "It's extremely frustrating," she says. Morgan says that some of Sheehan's sources are "compulsive liars," embroidering new details with each retelling. Others, she adds, such as Edwin Wilson, claim to have been completely misquoted. Wilson "thought that Danny Sheehan was putting two and two together and getting six," says Morgan, who expects that her documentary will suffer for lack of a clear beginning, middle, end, and moral.

Even Sheehan's plaintiff, Tony Avirgan, worries about his attorney's flair for the visionary truth. The idea that the Secret Team is responsible for the tide of cocaine that has washed up on American shores since the early 1980s—a staple of the Christic critique—strikes Avirgan as absurd. "The Medellin [cocaine] cartel is bigger than any government in Central America," says Avirgan from his home in Costa Rica. "They didn't need John Hull. They didn't need Costa Rica."

But Sheehan's most strident critics are those familiar with the Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern portions of his theory, which he seems to have pieced together largely from secondhand sources and a few key texts. "I read two pages [of the affidavit] and threw it away," says Ralph

McGehee, a former CIA agent who worked under Ted Shackley in Saigon and who has since become critical of the intelligence establishment. Other former agents who had served in Southeast Asia, including John Stockwell and Frank Snepp, were equally appalled at the routine errors contained in the text. Sheehan had Shackley and Clines running the Phoenix assassination program in Vietnam when the program had been discontinued, and the agents themselves had been shipped back to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Sheehan had Laotian opium warlord Vang Pao kicking back millions of dollars in drug profits to fund the Laotian and Vietnamese counter-insurgency programs when those campaigns were paid for from the U.S. Treasury. Dates and titles were wrong; numbers seemed to have been chosen for maximum effect. And the whole idea of Ted Shackley as a global Professor Moriarty seemed, as Stockwell says, ridiculous.

THE UPSHOT OF THE CRITICISM, PARTICULARLY on the Left, is not that Sheehan is dishonest but rather that he leaps in where others fear to tread—that he reasons from faith to facts, rather than the other way around. Sympathetic journalists and experts—"no less than 30 people," according to Dennis Bernstein—have tried to prevail on Sheehan to curtail his flights of imagination. Nothing doing. He's spent a lifetime standing up for unpopular truths: opposition only proves to him how right he is. "Journalists," he says breezily, "are saying, 'Well, that isn't 100 percent true; therefore I'm extremely troubled.' Then there are former CIA agents who say, 'Gee, I was there, and I didn't know that.'" Danny Sheehan's answer is that he's talked to people who were there and *did* know. He's talked to former military and intelligence officials who have sat in a room and listened to Ted Shackley devise the counter-insurgency program in Laos. One of his sources, he says, was a "courier" who brought money from Vang Pao to a Naval officer in Saigon named Richard Armitage. Directly? No, not directly; he was "on the chain." How did the source know that the money was intended for Armitage? "He didn't say." But "he knows for sure."

Sheehan's dismissiveness extends to the Congress, which he views, with a few exceptions, as hopelessly timid and reactionary. (He has called the House and Senate Intelligence Oversight Committees "totally corrupt.") Investigators on Capitol Hill generally return the favor by holding the Secret Team theory in low regard. One expert says she has yet to see "anything solid" on the contra claims, while the rest of the theory strikes her as "off-the-wall."

Last July when he was invited to speak

before a closed briefing of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, Sheehan had his one opportunity to prove to these skeptics that he was not a left-wing conspiracy nut. With 200 reporters waiting outside and the entire committee gathered before him, Sheehan, according to several astonished spectators, declined—over the course of a 90-minute briefing—to substantiate any of his charges. It was as if, said one observer, Sheehan considered his allegations perfectly self-evident.

Christic's credibility index rose a few points last summer when former CIA analyst David MacMichael joined the institute to head the growing investigative team and, like a patient theologian, pluck the mass of errors from the text of the affidavit. Especially within the ex-spook community, MacMichael is regarded as the ambassador to Danny Sheehan from the empire of level-headedness. It's not an easy way to make a living. "I wish," says MacMichael, choosing his words carefully, "that Danny Sheehan would pay a lot more attention to the case in the litigational sense and would avoid confrontation."

But MacMichael doesn't seem to have made much headway. I told Sheehan that MacMichael considers much of the Vang Pao story completely wrong. "As far as he knows," Sheehan said, without skipping a beat. In his speeches Sheehan continues to talk about the Secret Team's "hundreds of millions of dollars in Swiss bank accounts"; continues to describe Clines as Shackley's deputy; continues, in fact, to insist on virtually every fact that his own chief investigator has contested. Armitage, who is not even a defendant in the suit, is accused of acting as Shackley's bagman and banker all over the world, to the astonishment of those who have known him. MacMichael removed the entire Armitage story from a new version of the affidavit. Sheehan vows to put it back in. "David's thing is only a draft," says Sheehan, making his meaning perfectly clear.

The consequences of being proved significantly wrong could be quite grave for Sheehan. Lawyers for the defendants will clearly seize on any obvious error of fact to discredit him before the jury. Sheehan also could damage his credibility among liberals not yet devoted to the Christic crusade. Sara Nelson, who runs the day-to-day show at Christic, has pieced together a "Communications Alliance" of national organizations such as NOW, SANE, and various religious congregations, as well as a network of grass roots bodies known as "Contragate Action Teams." These groups will be mobilizing for the 1988 presidential and congressional elections; already Nelson plans to put Christic brochures into the hands of 100,000

voters in the upcoming Iowa caucus. A serious blow to the accuracy of the Christic theory could render all of this activity meaningless, and shatter the organization's larger political objectives.

Publicly criticizing Christic thus has become a highly touchy proposition, as well as an invitation to traditional intraleft bloodletting. In late August of last year *Wall Street Journal* reporter Jonathan Kwitny, author of the recent book *The Crimes of Patriots*, criticized Sheehan in a *Nation* article for making unsubstantiated allegations, and refusing to make sources available. A letters-page skirmish ensued, in which Kwitny, not a man of retiring nature, elaborated on his differences with Sheehan and accused him of "character assassination." Since that time, Kwitny says, he has been besieged by "glassy-eyed" Christic followers. On a fall promotional tour for *The Crimes of Patriots* Kwitny says he kept hearing the same questions again and again, all of them amounting to: Why do you disagree with Danny Sheehan? Kwitny compares the experience to facing the LaRouchites of the U.S. Labor Party.

Indeed, Christic is beginning to get a reputation for attracting the kind of fanatic camp followers who have occasionally made the Left an embarrassing place to be. John Stockwell says that a group of what he calls "Christies" last summer showed up at a Los Angeles fund-raiser designed to help his nascent group of ex-spies. While checks were being written a Christic supporter rose to denounce Stockwell for his deviationism, precipitating a vehement argument. Stockwell says that he called Nelson two weeks later to suggest they hold a joint press conference to prevent further intramural bloodletting. "If you're going to trash us," he recalls her snarling into the phone, "we'll fight you." (Nelson concedes the substance of her remarks, which she says she regrets. Stockwell now gives Christic credit for paying more attention to its critics in recent months.)

WAY OUT AT THE EDGE, WHERE DANNY SHEEHAN lives, the difference between hero and villain gets fuzzy. Anne Zill considers Sheehan a fair candidate for sainthood: canonized, his name would have to be changed to Saint George, the romantic hero who single-handedly slew the dragon. The possibility of martyrdom surrounds him like a nimbus, and Sheehan is not shy about discussing the death threat he has received from one of the defendants in the case. One gets the impression, in fact, that Sheehan considers himself a saint—thus his disdain for criticism, his recklessness, his lack of humility.

And yet Danny Sheehan has been willing to state in public things that he knew would

expose him to ridicule, because he had the prophet's faith that he would one day be vindicated. Sheehan insisted in early 1986 that U.S. foreign policy had been privatized and handed over to a group of men few people had heard of. Only a man with Danny Sheehan's blitheness and indifference to public opinion could have staked out a position that was, he says, "categorically different from the reality that everyone assumed to be true." He waited patiently, preaching to whomever would listen, until the world came around; and when it did, he was a force. "This issue would probably be nowhere," concedes one of Christic's detractors, "if it weren't for them."

Sheehan may not be a trustworthy reporter, and he may not even be a very good lawyer—there are severely mixed reports on that question—but he may be the perfect man with the bullhorn. Other people, including Jonathan Kwitny, Bob Woodward, reporters Brian Barger and Robert Parry, and Scott Armstrong of the National Security Archive have showered light on that secret stage where the game of power was being played out. But Danny Sheehan has turned the exposure into a popular crusade. He has managed to find in the confusing welter of events a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

And publicity matters. The Iran-contra sequence, with its appalling contempt for democratic means and the simple obligation to tell the public the truth, may pose the gravest constitutional threat since the McCarthy era. Yet that public, and certainly the presidential candidates, seems inclined to avert its gaze, as if the whole thing were simply too tawdry to contemplate. The Christic suit may force the issue onto the political agenda. Beyond that, by insisting on Iran-contra's historical antecedents, Sheehan has focused attention not on the personalities of Ronald Reagan and William Casey but on the process that began with the establishment of the CIA in 1947.

Danny Sheehan is a brilliant publicist with more than a shadow of the huckster, a charismatic personality who magnetizes others by the force of his certainty, a spiritual figure who sometimes stops to adjust his halo in the mirror. He enralls some people, and frightens others. He frightens some people on the Left, and not always just a little. But he also frightens Richard Secord, who paid \$60,000 to a former CIA agent to help him smear the Christic Institute. And if Danny Sheehan has the Secret Team—or whoever the hell they are—running scared, he must be doing something right.

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