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The Maltese Double ~~CROSS.~~

Michael Chanan

Allan Francovich's film on Lockerbie and the CIA

Allan Francovich's investigative documentary, *The Maltese Double Gross*, demonstrates that the official version of the Lockerbie disaster — that it was an act of state-sponsored terrorism carried out by two Libyan agents — is untrue, and the bombing was actually carried out by a Palestinian terrorist group backed by Hisbollah and with the collusion of the CIA. In fact it was a CIA operation that went terribly wrong.

The film, which became the subject of stories in the press early in 1993 when pressure was put on Channel 4 to turn it down, became a last-minute addition to the London Film Festival at the end of the year, only to be dropped a few days later when a London solicitor acting for an official of the US Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA) named Michael Hurley threatened action for libel. The Festival commented that claims similar to those made in the film are already the subject of a libel action and they had therefore reluctantly had to cancel the screening (Hurley is suing Bloomsbury over a book called *Trail of the Octopus* by former US intelligence agent Lester Coleman). Jim Swire, spokesman for bereaved families in Britain, said that if the film were only half true, 'there must have been a monumental cover-up'.

Francovich, an American film-maker well known for *On Company Business* and other documentaries exposing the CIA, presents the story through a series of interviews, which move from residents of Lockerbie and others involved in the clear-up immediately after the event, by way of Pan Am security staff at Heathrow, to a diffuse group consisting mainly of intelligence operatives, journalists and investigators, including the former Iranian prime minister Bani Sadr.

The first group of witnesses reveal strange goings-on in Lockerbie in the days following the disaster: unidentified Americans arriving on the scene even before the official search teams, and then snooping around and removing material independently of the police; unmarked helicopters flying around; and people being threatened with the Official Secrets Act if they spoke about what they saw (which has also prevented the police from revealing anything), especially that among the aircraft baggage that was recovered in tact was a suitcase full of heroin.

The second group tell us that normally, when a consignment of drugs is being shipped through the airport at the behest of the international law enforcement agencies involved in sting operations, they know about it, but not on this occasion. Another highly suspicious piece of information, communicated early in the film, reveals that Pik Botha and 15 other members of the South African Government of the day, were booked on Flight 103 but cancelled their travel plans at the last moment (and they were not the only ones: so did a number of American diplomats). A number of interviewees confirm that warnings had been received from various sources that the bombing of an American plane was imminent. (Several stories about these warnings were carried in the newspapers and on TV the first few days after the tragedy, but have since disappeared from mention.)

The last group of interviewees reveal what was really going on. The DEA, from its base in Cyprus, was running controlled drug deliveries out of Lebanon via Frankfurt to the United States, ostensibly as a sting in order to break up the drug smugglers. But the DEA was actually being run by the CIA, who had fallen in with Oliver North and his dealings with narco-terrorists based in Lebanon. Under the protection of the CIA and the DEA, one of the drug dealers involved with North's plan of support for the Nicaraguan Contras, Monzer Al-Kassar, was being allowed to run heroin into the United States in return for using his considerable influence among the Syrian-backed terrorists to help secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

STOP PRESS 24.1.95 U.S. INTELLIGENCE DOCUMENT IMPLICATES IRANIANS IN LOCKERBIE BOMBING

One of these terrorists, Ahmed Jibril, whose group was based in Germany, had been charged by Hisbollah with carrying out a revenge attack for the US bombing of an Iranian plane in July 1988. Jibril realised the security loophole in the drug-running operation, and decided to take advantage of it. The CIA was advised by a Syrian Hisbollah/CIA double agent based in Germany called Adnan Younis, who was also the man who bought the one-way ticket for the drugs courier. This was one Khaled Jafaar, who at the last minute was asked to take a tape recorder with him for someone in the States — the tape recorder which carried the bomb. (Curiously, Jafaar was named as the bomber, complete with photograph, in the *Daily Express* about ten days after the bombing.)

When Francovich was first alerted to the cover-up by contacts he had made while working on earlier films, he was to be found at Observer Films, the newspaper's production company, then owned by Lonrho. But the story told in *The Maltese Double Cross* goes far beyond what the boss of Lonrho, Tiny Rowlands, believed when he decided to back its production in summer 1993, because he wanted to know if the Libyans were really involved'. (Why didn't he use the newspaper to find out? Because the paper's lead reporter on the story was squarely behind the official version.)

Rowlands verified one piece of intelligence for himself before proceeding. He telephoned Pik Botha, who confirmed that the South Africans had changed their travel plans at the last moment, after warnings by Mossad and the CIA. Francovich says

that, mindful of Lonrho's connections with Libya, he accepted Rowlands' backing only on condition that he had complete editorial control; a separate production company was set up and Rowlands did not see the film until it was almost finished. But the man once pilloried by Edward Heath as 'the unacceptable face of capitalism' did not hide his interest in the film — to clear Gadafy's name. Nor did he withdraw his backing, says Francovich, when Foreign Office minister Douglas Hogg, whom he told about the film, responded by warning him off it. Francovich is also willing to speculate that the growing concern of the Lonrho board about the revelations in the film might be one of the reasons that they ousted Rowlands in October. He believes that Dieter Bock, joint chief executive of Lonrho since 1992, was advised by the British Foreign Office and the secret service to get the film stopped.

In the meantime, stories about the film had reached the press, stories in which Francovich was accused of being a 'nut and a hoaxer' and of 'whoring for Gadafy'; while Channel 4, who were considering the film, was under pressure from the parents of one of the victims in America, who pestered them with phone calls and faxes. He then discovered that the American couple concerned had been briefed by one of his own sources for the story, a former US operative named Richard Fuicz, but had reacted quite differently: they feared that if the story came out they would lose their suit against Pan Am. (Who told them this? The lawyer for Pan Am.)

The Channel became nervous, and at the time of writing, had not yet agreed on terms of transmission. They did not handle the publicity at all well but in part, says Francovich, they were only exercising their proper editorial functions. They had asked, for example, for an interview with Botha, who declined (likewise Rowlands, so the information about the South Africans in the film is given in commentary). They had legitimate concern that the film should be watertight. Granada TV had been sued by Air Malta for allegations contained in a docudrama on the subject, which had been made rather too hastily. To complicate matters, one of Francovich's key interviewees and a consultant on the film, a ex-company man called Oswald Le Winter, had a suspicious reputation, after the Germans had busted him for drug running. He has also appeared in a major TV series on the CIA from another source which was known to be an apologia made with the CIA's cooperation and probably ghost-written by them.

Since this is not the first time it has happened to him, Francovich is more than sanguine about the continued attempts to stop the film. He is ready to do battle, ready with documentation for everything in the film, and more. He says that he himself was startled by what he found, even given everything he already knew about the CIA; and while at first he was prepared to believe that the tragedy was a bungled operation, the scale of the cover-up has made him think again. If this is a film about the CIA's cynical involvement with the drug-dealing terrorists who represent their enemy, then what happened in the sky over Lockerbie was the result of a terrible logic. 'In their obsession to destroy what they view as a monstrous social system, they themselves have become the monster. And they end up protecting the perpetrators of terrorist acts by groups which the CIA has infiltrated for the purpose of controlling them.'

Francovich's dogged persistence in piecing together the extraordinary tale can be sensed in the meticulous, painstaking build up of evidence on the screen: the film runs almost three hours. 'Your audience,' he says, 'has a story in their heads about what happened, you have to take them through the refutation of this story step by step.' The

only problem with this strategy is that the evidence keeps splaying off in different directions, since the world in which these operations take place is one of innumerable interconnecting tendrils, and even in two and a half hours not all loose ends can be tied up. Besides, there are gaps in information, since the film raises as many questions of detail as it answers.

It is in the nature of documentary that the film you see on the screen is only one version of the film that was shot, that the film that was shot is only one version of the film that could have been shot, and there is always the film that could not have been shot because it is the film of what was going on behind the camera while it was pointing another way. Many of the problems about representation in the documentary arise from peculiar tensions between these unseen films and the one we see, tensions which are redoubled when the subject of the film is inherently invisible and actively trying to confuse the picture, like the CIA. In this case you begin to ask yourself not what are these people saying, but what are they not saying? And why are they not saying it?

Francovich is particularly fascinated by one of these unspoken stories, which flits through *The Maltese Double Cross* in the visage of Oswald Le Winter. The whole history of the CIA, he says, is contained in the story of Le Winter. Le Winter was an Austrian Jew, who had been incarcerated in Dachau as a child, but set free on the eve of the war when a group of children in the camp, selected for their intelligence, were allowed to be sent to America. There he became an academic and was recruited by the CIA when, in the course of research into the influence of Shakespeare in Europe, he visited Eastern Europe. He is now, after an operation which backfired, a disillusioned idealist. Le Winter was one of those who raised money for Oliver North by manipulating the drug runners. The plan was to bust the Mafia and link them to the Libyans, and end up with a lot of money. But Le Winter slipped up and was arrested by the Germans, who mistook him for a 'real' drug runner. Extradited to the US, he spent more than two years behind bars and escaped a couple of murder attempts while in prison.

Reason enough, perhaps, to become an apostate, but there is more to it than that. The result of the historical changes of the last few years, says Francovich, 'is that a lot of people who could have justified their actions for the greater good are now questioning what they did, because the evil empire of communism has collapsed and revealed the CIA to have been nothing but a mirror image of the KGB.'

There is one other major puzzle in the film, in the information that among the victims of Lockerbie was a DEA agent called McKee, who was probably not on the flight by accident: he had originally been booked to fly the following day, and someone had changed the booking. It is Michael Hurley, of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who telexed the change in McKee's travel plans, who is now threatening a libel action against the film. There is reason to believe that McKee had become disillusioned, and was returning to the States in order to blow the lid on the whole operation. He may have intended to use Khaled Jafaar for his exposé. Did the CIA take advantage of their foreknowledge of the bombing to bump him off?

The CIA was always like this, says Francovich, but here they colluded with the murder of almost 300 innocent citizens, the very people they are supposed to be

protecting. This is what The Maltese Double Cross is about. They want to stop the film because its release could have drastic consequences for them - and for those who have colluded in the cover-up.

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