

Leading 'China-basher' bites the dust

by William Jones

Notra Trulock, an intelligence official at the Department of Energy (DOE) and the leading exponent of the China "nuclear espionage" hoax, resigned his post on Aug. 23, in the face of growing criticism of his overzealous campaign to discover Chinese espionage at the national laboratories. Trulock has been marketing a story about the alleged Chinese theft of computer codes related to the W-88, a miniaturization of a nuclear device developed by the United States. The source of the charge is a document allegedly given to the CIA by a "walk-in" Chinese intelligence agent.

On the "Meet the Press" Sunday talk show, back in May, Trulock had compared the "Chinese espionage" to the Rosenberg case during the McCarthy witchhunts. Trulock's allegations played a major role in the campaign by Congressional Republicans to whip up a "red scare," with clearly racist overtones, against China, and they reappeared in the incompetent Cox Committee report. The allegations have been effectively debunked by the State Council of the Chinese government.

The espionage allegation has, however, developed into a major embarrassment for the purveyors of the hoax. The only person targetted when Trulock launched his investigation, was a Chinese-American of Taiwanese extraction, Dr. Wen Ho Lee, who worked as a physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory. When the allegations against Lee became public, leading representatives of the Chinese-American scientific community expressed concern over the racial implications for their own work. Indeed, as it turned out, Lee drew Trulock's fire precisely because he is Chinese-American.

Trulock claims that his resignation is a result of his having been taken off the DOE investigation. In reality, this "spy-chaser" has been thoroughly exposed as a charlatan. Trulock accused the DOE of having tried to prevent him in 1998 from giving evidence to a Congressional committee. His allegations resulted in a probe by the DOE Inspector General, which published its results just a few days prior to Trulock's resignation. The IG found no evidence whatsoever that Trulock had been hampered in his actions by the department.

By spring 1999, however, Trulock had become the darling of the Republican China-bashers in Congress. Late last year, Trulock, in his capacity as a high-level DOE official, had agreed to become a secret witness for a Congressional committee. When his role became public, he started appearing at hearing after hearing, and on the Sunday talk show circuit to expound about the "lax" security at the national labs and the

gravity of the alleged "nuclear espionage." Trulock's flimsy allegations were treated as sacrosanct in the 700-page "Cox Report," released on May 25, 1999 by the House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China, and chaired by Rep. Chris Cox (R-Calif.). Whenever Republican operatives wanted to whip up frenzy about "Chinese espionage," they would exhibit Trulock as the "honest whistle-blower."

Although Wen Ho Lee asserted his innocence, even allowing himself to be interviewed on national television to make his case, the pressure which Trulock and his GOP compatriots on Capitol Hill had succeeded in generating led Energy Secretary Bill Richardson to fire Lee from his post at Los Alamos, along with three officials responsible for security at national laboratories. Trulock, on the other hand, was awarded \$10,000 for his "valuable service" in pursuing this chimera.

The ugly face of racism

One of those dismissed, Robert Vrooman, the former chief of counterintelligence at Los Alamos, in an interview with the Aug. 18 *Washington Post*, spoke out about the effort to frame up Lee, saying that Lee had been targetted by Trulock because he is Chinese-American. Vrooman said that the DOE Office of Counterintelligence had identified Lee as "the prime suspect based on, at best, cursory investigation at only two facilities," i.e., Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore. Vrooman also disagreed with Trulock's conclusion that the Chinese had stolen any designs of the W-88.

Charles E. Washington, who had been DOE Acting Director of Counterintelligence in 1996 when Trulock first started pursuing the espionage investigation, had at the time written to Trulock recommending that the Lee case be closed for lack of evidence, and telling Trulock that he was unfairly singling out Lee and another Chinese-American scientist at Los Alamos, when numerous others had similar access to secrets. "We need one good espionage case to make this [counterintelligence] program grow," Trulock told Washington. "There's one spy out there, and we're going to find him." Washington, an African-American, is currently suing the DOE in Federal court over Trulock's retaliation against him because of his opposition to the investigation.

One physicist at Los Alamos, Michael Soukup, who has spent years studying China's nuclear weapons testing and design complex, told the *Washington Post* that he also believes Trulock went after Lee for racial reasons. In a message to the *Post*, Soukup said, "It became very clear to me that this investigation was driven almost exclusively by Notra Trulock."

Although Trulock did play a role in this particular farce, the real criminals are those GOP Congressmen who are attempting to make China into the "new enemy-image." Their shenanigans with the various spy hoaxes, and their mucking about in the sensitive Taiwan-China relationship, comprise the greatest threat to U.S. national security.