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Le**t**t**e**r**s**



Timely Neglect

Dear Editor:

Thanks so much for Marc Cooper's analysis of the *Los Angeles Times*' Central America coverage [Newspeak, *L.A. Weekly*, May 15-21]. Perhaps I can add to a fuller understanding of the *Times*' mental state, based on an amazing conversation I recently had with a staffer at the *Times*' foreign desk.

On May 14, I learned of an attempt to frame American journalists Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey in Costa Rica, which was subsequently reported on your pages. This in a clumsy "mail-order" drug plant, which appeared to have been set up by Costa Rican narcotics agents. I decided to call the *Times*, to ask that they cover the story. I was transferred to a writer/editor (they would not give me his title when I called back later) with "extensive experience" in Latin America. He listened patiently to my suggestions that this was really "news"; that with Costa Rican President Arias out of the country, Avirgan and Honey were very vulnerable; that they had received death threats as a result of their reporting on the secret airstrip on John Hull's ranch (used to supply the contras and run drugs); that we were not hearing enough about their work down there.

With only an interruption or two to correct my pronunciation ("Arias" is accented on the *first* syllable), my handler heard me out. Then, in a mellifluous, fatherly voice he said, "You know that most of the journalists down there think that Avirgan and Honey are working for the Sandinistas?" When I asked him whether these alleged opinions meant that their situation did not deserve attention, or that their journalism should be ignored, he said, "No, I just thought you ought to know that."

Not surprisingly, nothing appeared in the *Times* about the attempt to smear Avirgan and Honey, even though it was fully reported by AP out of Mexico City, and distributed by NPR.

What can one say about a newspaper whose high-level staffers try to con a reader with the old “blame the victim” ploy? It’s probably unprintable.

—Bill Becker
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