

SISTER RITA GETS 6-MONTH SENTENCE—DO-GOODER NUN AWAITS JAIL FOR PROTEST AT FORT BENNING

Doug Grow

Sometime in the next few weeks, we are supposed to believe the country will become a safer place because a 70-year-old woman, Sister Rita Steinhagen, will be whisked off our streets and hauled to a federal penitentiary to serve a six-month sentence.

Sister Rita, who has been serving the poor and downtrodden in Minneapolis for only a few decades, was among 22 people found guilty Wednesday in a federal court in Georgia of trespassing at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Georgia. She not only was hit with the hard time, but with a \$3,000 fine as well—a hefty sum when you've been living with a vow of poverty for 47 years.

Sister Rita was surprised by the sentence. "What did you expect?" I asked.

"I didn't expect six months," she said.

"When you do the crime, you're going to get the time," I said.

But Sister Rita says that's not true. She talked of how people, allegedly taught at the School of the Americas, have murdered and raped in Latin American countries and never served any time at all. Sister Rita and others of her ilk keep thinking that if U.S. citizens ever understand that their tax money is being spent to train despots, rapists and murderers, they will be outraged and demand policy changes.

To date, it's not working out that way. So far, what's happening is that people such as Sister Rita are being sent to prison for having the audacity to peacefully protest and the rest of us are yawning. Anyway, the reason Sister Rita and the others got hit with the prison sentences for their misdemeanor offenses in November is that they were repeat offenders at Fort Benning.

So, who is Rita the Repeater?

For starters, she really doesn't look like a threat. She has white hair, a quick smile and a delightful sense of humor. For example, when she got off the plane at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport Thursday night after being sentenced in Georgia, she was greeted by friends and supporters clapping and singing, "When the Saints Go Marching In."

Sister Rita's response to the greeting?

"I said: 'This is peculiar. I got six months in jail, and everybody's clapping.'"

There's little in her biography to suggest that she's a threat. She grew up in Walker, Minn., learning to fish. (Her single most prized possession is her fishing rod, which she uses whenever she can.) She didn't even plan to become a nun. At 23, she went to visit a friend who was becoming a nun and discovered she felt comfortable.

"Do you think I belong here?" she asked one of the sisters.

"I certainly do," was the response.

And so it was done. Rita Steinhagen was on her way to becoming a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Sister Ann Walton, who is among the order's leadership team, said Sister Rita has represented the soul of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

"She is one of our finest," Sister Ann said. "She's in the pattern of the women [sisters] in the French Revolution who were imprisoned for their beliefs. She's in a very long line of people who have given of themselves."

Over the years, Sister Rita has worked as a medical technologist. In her career, she has founded a place called The Bridge, a shelter for runaway youth, and The Free Store. (The Free Store, founded by Sister Rita in 1968, still exists, though it no longer is affiliated with the Sisters of St. Joseph.) Of late, she

has been working with torture victims at the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis.

Through the years, she has been arrested at several Twin Cities protests but never served jail time. She also has made frequent work-related trips to Latin American countries and has been horrified at what she has seen and heard. It was the Latin American journeys that led her to the protest at the School of the Americas.

This Minnesota woman who has devoted her life to quietly doing good, didn't accept her sentence in silence.

"I told the judge: 'Your honor, I'm 70 years old today, and I've never been in prison, and I'm scared. I tell you, when decent people get put in jail for six months for peaceful demonstration, I'm more scared of what's going on in our country than I am of going to prison.'"

The response of Judge Robert Elliot? "He didn't say anything," she said. "He couldn't care less."

Now, she's back in Minnesota waiting for the letter that will inform her where she's supposed to go to serve her sentence.

"There's no room," she said of the delayed sentence. "Isn't that something. You have to wait in line to go to prison."

This weekend, she planned to do her waiting by going ice-fishing in northern Minnesota. Rita the Repeater is going fishing because she needs the solitude—but beyond that, she'll be in prison when the spring opener rolls around.

PROHIBITION ON FEDERALLY SPONSORED NATIONAL TESTING

SPEECH OF

HON. PATSY T. MINK

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 5, 1998

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2846) to prohibit spending Federal education funds on national testing without explicit and specific legislation:

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii. Mr. Chairman, today I will vote against H.R. 2846, which seeks to prohibit the implementation of the national tests proposed by President Clinton.

The debate on national testing is not a new one. I remember these debates from the 60's and 70's and even more recently in the early 1990's. I opposed national testing then and I oppose it now.

My vote today does not reflect a change in my position on this issue, it is simply a statement that this bill is not needed at this time. We know there is a wide difference of opinion on national testing and it does always fall along party lines. In fact, the last major debate on national testing in the Congress was in 1991 and 1992 over a Bush Administration initiative to implement a much broader national testing system than what is being proposed by President Clinton.

When President Clinton offered his proposal for a national Reading test for the 4th grade and a national Math test in the 8th grade, we again embarked on this familiar debate.

With very passionate arguments on each side of this issue, the Congress—Members of the House and Senate—worked very hard last year to craft a compromise in the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill. While not per-

fect, as most compromises are not, it was something that Members with very different views could agree on.

The compromise allows only the development of test, not the implementation or the distribution. It transfers the responsibility of overseeing the tests to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the same organization that conducts the well-respected NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress) test.

The bill before us today flies in the face of that compromise. It adds no constructive element to the debate that continues on whether we should move forward on a national test and whether the Congress is ready to authorize such a measure. It seems more a political maneuver to focus on areas of disagreement, rather than to move forward on the many items of mutual agreement in an education agenda for this country.

This year the Congress must consider the reauthorization of NAGB and NAEP. It seems to me a more constructive approach would be to consider in the context of this reauthorization whether to authorize a national testing system. The compromise forged in the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill will stand while the Congress works on the NAGB and NAEP legislation. Why we need to take up this legislation at this time, only a few legislative days since the passage of the Labor-HHS-Education compromise is puzzling.

Therefore, I will vote against this bill today. It is not constructive and it does nothing to further the debate on national testing in this country.

CONCERNING ATTORNEYS' FEES, COSTS, AND SANCTIONS PAYABLE BY THE WHITE HOUSE HEALTH CARE TASK FORCE

SPEECH OF

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 4, 1998

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 107) expressing the sense of the Congress that the award of attorneys' fees, costs, and sanctions of \$285,864.78 ordered by United States District Judge Royce C. Lamberth on December 18, 1997, should not be paid with taxpayer funds:

Mr. STARK. Mr. Chairman, February 4, the House wasted an afternoon debating a totally meaningless "sense of the Congress" that the taxpayer "should" not have to pay about \$300,000 in lawyers' fees for a group which had sued the White House over the make-up and secrecy of the long-defunct Health Care Task Force.

It was pure partisan bashing of the Clinton's health reform efforts. I repeatedly offered a unanimous consent amendment (the parliamentary rules of germaneness prevented a regular amendment) to make the Resolution real: to save the taxpayers from paying this fine. Repeatedly the Republicans rejected the offer to do what they claimed their Resolution was "trying" to do.

All in all, their position on this Resolution was the most transparent political nonsense that the Congress has seen in years.