

AFD Ep 360 Links and Notes - Frank Church [Rachel] - Recording Mar 21
Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church by LeRoy Ashby & Rod Gramer
(WSU Press: 1994)

You're listening to Arsenal For Democracy episode 360, recorded on Sunday March 21, 2021. I'm your host Rachel recording from Boise, Idaho.

This episode is about Frank Church, last Democratic senator from Idaho. Famous for his investigations into the misdeeds of multinational corporations and the intelligence community. I wanted to talk about him because Idaho is seen as a Republican stronghold, but I wanted to highlight his popularity and his 4-term tenure as US senator. The research for this episode came from the extremely well-researched and well-sourced *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* by LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, published in 1994 by WSU Press.

- Born July 25, 1924 in Boise, Idaho. He was a precocious youth, writing a letter to the editor urging the US to stay out of the War in Europe at age 14, and competed nationally in oratory. He always knew he would go into politics, and admired William E. Borah, US Senator from Idaho 1907-1940. Although his father was a Republican small business owner, Church became a Democrat after FDR visited Boise in 1938. After Pearl Harbor, Church re-thought his isolationist stance, and vowed to enlist, which he did after attending Stanford for two quarters.
- The Beginning (WWII-1950s)
 - Church ended up in intelligence in the Asian theater of combat, mostly in India and China, analyzing Japanese troop movement.
 - While in Asia, he saw firsthand the effects of colonialism, which deepened his disdain for imperialism, and he was concerned about the US launching its own imperialistic program to maintain wartime levels of productivity and employment
 - After the war, he graduated from Stanford, then got a law degree from Stanford. Worked as a lawyer until deciding to run for Idaho Legislature in 1952. He lost terribly, placing fifth in a field of 8. Worked on changing the Idaho Democratic Party until he ran for US Senate in 1956. The elders of the Party worried that he was too green to win a statewide office, but he heavily canvassed the state and won, beating arch-conservative Herman Welker
 - Once in office, he quickly made a name for himself, helping to get the Civil Rights Act of 1957 passed, which earned him the favor of Majority Leader LBJ, who put him on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1959, like his hero Borah. Also worked on Alaska and Hawaii statehood efforts 1958-1959.
 - From the very beginning, he opposed secrecy surrounding military assistance in Latin America. However, he was not immune to Cold War saber-rattling, giving speeches warning of Russia spreading communism in Africa and Asia. He endorsed encouraging domestic reforms to fight Communism, rather than propping up American-friendly dictators
- The 60s (The Failures of Liberalism in the Vietnam Era)
 - Endorsed JFK over LBJ at the 1960 Democratic National Convention
 - Praised JFK's "positive new policy toward Africa", unaware the CIA was taking covert action against Patrice Lumumba, saw anti-colonialism as a way to foster independence in Africa while fighting communism's encroachment on the continent.
 - Was concerned that the Cold War rhetoric allied the US with dictators such as the Shah in Iran
 - Domestically he embraced "a new birth of liberalism". Government was meant to protect citizens from economic hardship and ensure fairness in the market, where small businesses could compete against corporations.

- Emerged as a wilderness conservationist trying to pass a wilderness bill in 1961-1962; passed the Senate but died in the House.
- His wilderness bill provided opposition fodder for his re-election campaign in 1962, but he won with almost 55% of the vote
- Church had his misgivings about South Vietnam under the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, but he had to balance that with his support for JFK. After Diem's assassination, he was concerned that the US was getting pulled into the conflict.
- After JFK's assassination, LBJ wanted to look tough in Vietnam to hold Russia and China at bay, but he also wanted to work on his Great Society project at home, and sentiment at the time was against interfering in Vietnam. However, the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 changed the equation. While Church threw his support behind LBJ, he later came to regret his decision. The fear of a Goldwater presidency led to backing LBJ more than was prudent.
- Church tried to find the middle ground between speaking out as an anti-war senator while still trying to support the presidency against a rising right-wing, but this strategy largely failed, and Church voted for funding bills for the US to "honor their commitments" in Vietnam, which just led to further expansion into Vietnam. This also damaged his reputation amongst his fellow doves; he was seen as a tool of the administration who could be manipulated to vote the way LBJ wanted him to.
- In 1967 he faced an attempted recall campaign, but it only strengthened his popularity in Idaho. The money for the recall came from out of state, and this raised the hackles of fiercely independent Idahoans. Church could spin the outside interference into his favor, and he won his 1968 re-election with 60% of the vote.
- After Nixon won in 1968, Church came out stronger against the war in Vietnam, but had to contend with a strong Executive Branch
- The 70s (Cooper-Church Amendments/Case-Church Amendment/Church Committee)
 - Cooper-Church Amendments
 - In Dec 1969, Senate passed first of a series of Cooper-Church Amendments
 - Prohibited the use of American combat troops in Laos or Thailand
 - In 1970, Cooper and Church tried to pass further Amendments attached to the Foreign Military Sales Act of 1971
 - End funding for maintaining ground troops in Cambodia and Laos after June 30, 1970
 - Ban air operations in Cambodia in support of Cambodian forces without Congressional approval
 - End American support for Republic of Vietnam forces outside territorial South Vietnam
 - These amendments passed the Senate, but failed in the House. Nixon had threatened to veto the bill if it contained the amendments. A version of the bill without the Cooper-Church Amendments passed.
 - A later version of the Amendments, with the ban on air operations taken out, passed; they were attached to the Foreign Aid Authorization bill of 1970.
- Case-Church Amendment
 - Initially attempted in May 1972, attached to a State Department funding bill, but was defeated. Reintroduced in January 1973, and passed June 1973. It barred any kind of US re-entry into hostilities in Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia without congressional authorization. Although US troops were withdrawn from Vietnam in late March in accordance with the Paris peace agreement, bombing in Cambodia and Laos continued until the August 15, 1973 deadline set by the Amendment.

Multinational investigations

- In early 1972, columnist Jack Anderson published stories about the misdeeds of The International Telephone and Telegraph Company (ITT). Allegedly, the Justice Department settled its antitrust suit against ITT in exchange for ITT's \$400,000 contribution to the Republican National Convention. Then, Anderson published more stories accusing ITT of plotting with the CIA to block the election of Chile's president Salvador Allende in 1970. Allende threatened to nationalize ITT's 60% interest in the Chilean telephone company. Anderson also claimed that ITT's president Harold Geneen offered the Nixon administration a contribution of "up to seven figures" to keep Allende out of power.
- The Senate Foreign Relations Committee sprung into action to open an investigation into ITT and other multinational corporations, largely backed by public opinion. This investigation was to last 2-3 years, with Church chairing the subcommittee.
- Church had long been an out-spoken opponent of big business and he operated without corporate support.
- ITT operated telephone systems in over 120 countries by 1969, and also controlled Avis rental car company, Levitt and Sons Builders, Continental Baking, and Sheraton Hotels.
- When former CIA director Richard Helms was appointed Ambassador to Iran, the subcommittee had a unique opportunity to question him on the ITT/CIA war against Allende. As Sens. Church, Case, and Fulbright interrogated Helms, Senator Stuart Symington offered up William Broe, the CIA head of clandestine services for Latin America, and ITT liaison in 1970. Broe led to Harold Geneen, ITT's CEO. The committee revealed that collaboration between ITT and CIA occurred at the highest levels.
- In 1974, the subcommittee investigated oil multinationals, who were enjoying record profits as oil shortages loomed large and oil prices soared. Columnist Jack Anderson again published shocking stories on the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco) colluding with Saudis to raise oil prices to cover up their upgrades to neglected American oil fields, while also over-pumping Saudi oil and causing pressure drops in Saudi Arabia's oil fields, endangering the supply. The investigation showed that Aramco lobbied for pro-Arab US foreign policy to curry favor with the Saudi government, acting as instruments of the Saudi government. Aramco even gave intelligence to the Saudi government detailing the quantity of oil provided to the US military, which allowed the Saudis to scale back production, giving them leverage over the military.

1974 election

- The subcommittee investigations were a liability during the election, because he didn't have time to campaign, and he was seen as ignoring the constituents in favor of foreign policy. Despite this, and growing opposition from right-wing groups like the John Birch Society, he still won 55% of the vote.

1975: "The Year of the Investigation"/Church Committee

- In 1975, the subcommittee investigated Northrop and Lockheed for bribing governments to sell military planes and electrical hardware. The Nixon administration encouraged this as a way to exert anti-communist influence in the Middle East without sending troops. The investigation into Lockheed spilled into other countries, implicating Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, the Italian government, and former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka of Japan.
- After the ITT investigation, Church wanted to go after the CIA and the FBI for their expansion of powers, but was rebuffed until an investigative article by

Seymour Hersh came out, detailing the illegal intelligence operation by the CIA against thousands of Americans, especially antiwar activists. On January 27 1975, by a vote of 82-4, a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities was formed. It was tasked with investigating the CIA, FBI and other intelligence-gathering agencies.

- One of the first investigations was into political assassinations of foreign leaders. Although Democrats were worried that they would be tarnished by the actions of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the committee pushed ahead. They uncovered Operation MONGOOSE, the plot to assassinate Fidel Castro; as well as the plot to murder Patrice Lumumba, the premier of the Belgian Congo. In other incidents, the CIA armed dissidents to overthrow their governments: Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem, and General Rene Schneider of Chile. The committee also found evidence that the CIA might also have been involved in plots to murder Achmed Sukarno of Indonesia and Francois Duvalier of Haiti.
- In the first public hearing, 9 months after the formation of the committee, Church exhibited a poison dart gun developed by the CIA. The shot of Church with the gun caught the public's attention, which quickly wavered after the committee got bogged down in discussing chemical weapons.
- Other discoveries by the committee: FBI's COINTELPRO, which undermined civil rights groups; a special unit in the IRS which "politically harassed" political activists; and major communications companies such as ITT and RCA routinely provided the CIA access to telegrams that Americans sent abroad for over 30 years. The CIA ran a 20-year mail intercept program that included a letter that Church mailed in 1971 to his mother-in-law in Boise. The committee also uncovered the efforts of the Nixon White House to use the FBI, CIA, NSA, and the Defense Intelligence Agency to mount a massive, and highly illegal, domestic surveillance campaign.
- Church used the committees to publicly question America's role in the world. He compared the US to a drug addict hooked on the Cold War and imperialism. To feed its habit it backed some of the world's most brutal dictatorships and created a security system that was more and more "a mirror image of the evil it is designed to combat."

Late career

- After a failed Presidential run in 1976, Church struggled to work with the Carter administration. Carter, as a Washington outsider, didn't like Church and his Washington insider status. However, Church was still productive, meeting with Castro and convincing him to free several political prisoners. Also, Church worked hard on the ratification of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, which returned the Panama Canal to Panama. This made him widely unpopular in Idaho, and led to the formation of the ABC ("Anybody but Church") committee, which supported Church's opponent in the 1980 Senate election, Steve Symms. Church lost the election by less than 1% of the vote. Depressed turnout in the Panhandle (Pacific Time Zone), caused by the premature calling of Idaho for Reagan after polls closed in Southern Idaho (Mountain Time Zone), may have led to Church's loss.