

## *Wagging the Dog at NRA*

*July 30, 2000*

**I**n the satirical movie *Wag The Dog*, the political operative for a U.S. President with zipper troubles induces a movie producer to fake a diversionary foreign war. (The movie came out just as the Monica Lewinsky story broke prompting Bill Clinton to bomb the only pharmaceutical plant in Sudan.)

After the scheme worked and the movie President was reelected, the producer character boasted publicly about what he had done, explaining to the President's exasperated political operative that movie producers *must* get a credit line.

That explains why NRA Director and Hollywood movie producer, John Milius, couldn't resist publicly bragging about how he and extremely well-paid NRA political consultant Tony Makris saved Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre's job in 1997—and, coincidentally, saved Makris' multi-million dollar NRA public relations/advertising/fundraising contracts.

The story appears in a surprisingly even-handed article about NRA in the August 6, 2000 *Washington Post Magazine*, the newspaper's Saturday and Sunday supplement.

"We were facing a genuine and extremely well-organized coup d'etat," Milius told writer Michael Powell. "So we used our best techniques: lying, cheating and disinformation. I didn't tell the truth for weeks."

What John called a "coup d'etat" was the effort of the 1996-97 NRA Board to do its fiduciary duty as imposed by New York Not-For-Profit Corporation Law and set forth in NRA Bylaws to "formulate the policies and govern and have general oversight of the affairs and property of the Association."

A majority of the Directors, the two NRA vice presidents (Albert Ross

and me) and the Finance Chairman were extremely unhappy about the demonstrably poor public relations performance of Makris's company, Ackerman McQueen, plus the fact that LaPierre had spent millions of dollars for public relations and advertising (and for Makris' own television hunting program) without complying with long-established Board policy.

We were determined to either get rid of Ackerman McQueen (as Wayne had told the officers, finance committee and Board he had done, but hadn't) or LaPierre was going to lose the job of EVP.

"Makris and Milius invited a Knox loyalist to dinner in Los Angeles and seemingly conspired to bribe LaPierre into leaving," Powell wrote.

What actually happened, I learned long afterwards (some of it in the past few days), was that Makris and Milius were ostensibly negotiating with some of my friends on behalf of Wayne. Under the deal they "offered," Wayne would bow out of the EVP job in exchange for a contract to write fundraising letters for a healthy commission.

Makris and Milius insisted I not be informed of the "negotiations"—well aware I wouldn't consider such a thing.

They asked one of my friends, a lawyer, to draft the agreement that "Wayne wanted." They even had the lawyer make several revisions during the course of the "negotiations" for Wayne's "golden parachute."

As Powell wrote it: "Milius leaked the plot to LaPierre, who rose publicly and proclaimed himself shocked—*shocked!*—that a Knox ally would try buy him off.

"LaPierre, in fact, gamed the moment perfectly," says the article.

Indeed he did, and I've never doubted that Wayne knew about the scheme from the beginning—particularly since I'm told he had initially suggested the fundraising commission deal.

Earlier this month, Powell sent me an email to check some routine personal facts. He told me he had spoken with Milius and several board members at the Charlotte meeting.

"They were surprisingly open in talking about the plot to save LaPierre's job, install Heston and beat you. Milius claims that Makris was behind much of it, that he and Makris met in Hollywood several times to plot strategy. And, Milius further claimed, they accomplished much of their victory by lying for weeks and weeks."

I was astounded that they had told him what they had done—though I well knew that Makris had organized the coup to save his contract—openly running his long-time friend and ally Charlton Heston's campaign to elect him to the board, and defeat me as NRA 1st V.P.

That's when I violated my general rule of not talking to the press about NRA internal matters. (When Powell asked for an interview last spring, I

told him I would tell him as much as he wanted to know about the gun issue, but wouldn't talk about NRA—my standard answer that has run off reporters for the *New York Times*, *Nightline* and many others.)

I emailed Powell back: "Milius was correct about Makris being mainly behind it. Of course he was. He was the one who would have been out of a job. We had too much invested in Wayne to throw him away.

"It wasn't a corporate takeover or coup d'etat," I continued to Powell, "It was a mutiny of the staff, assisted by NRA vendors determined to keep some very lucrative contracts. The same vendors for the same reason ran the expensive and successful advertising and mail campaigns that have succeeded in removing all those who voted against Wayne in '97."

That's one reason I'm sponsoring an NRA Bylaw to prohibit NRA vendors, and others whose livelihood depends on NRA largesse, from funding or participating in NRA internal elections.

### **Editor's Note**

The Bylaw change failed. NRA vendors are free to fund and participate in NRA elections.