

From

FIRST, the political reality context so all this can be put in some reasonable perspective:

No one in Washington has even mentioned the "international war crimes tribunal" to me since I came back from New York about a week ago.

Nor has there been a word about it in the major newspapers or the major television media — nothing.

This said, something interesting and unusual — and something at least some think important — did take place recently at Martin Luther King Jr High School on 66th Street in central Manhattan.

Officially titled "The Commission of Inquiry" of the "International War Crimes Tribunal", those who attended this five-hour event on February 29 in New York City were quite obviously dancing to a different drummer.

At \$10 an admission ticket, the high school auditorium was jammed to overflowing with a few thousand mostly true-believers who had come to witness the inquiry's final day.

Indeed organisers were forced to open the school cafeteria to those who couldn't squeeze into the jammed auditorium.

In reality in was far more a political "event" than a real "trial", the "judges" themselves far more partisans than objective jurists.

"The Commission Of Inquiry", to be candid, was far more a pre-decided finale to a three-day international gathering during which a panel of some 20 like-minded judges, from nearly as many countries, listened to eye-witness testimony, watched videos, and at times even participated themselves in an event designed to focus attention on what the organisers believe to be war crimes perpetrated by the United States against Iraq.

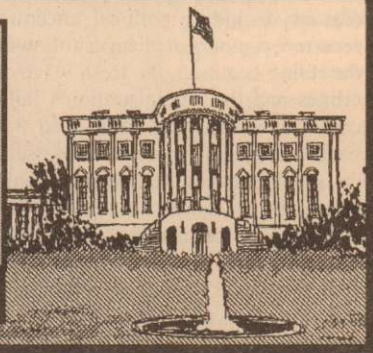
There were sizable delegations from many countries, including Japan and Germany, and a variety of reports from groups which had previously held one form or another of street protests, demonstrations, or war crimes trials in their own countries.

In preparation for this international event there had been previous Commission of Inquiry Hearings or Meetings in some 20 countries worldwide. Judges came from such disparate locations as Tanzania, Panama, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Japan.

Whatever, the fact that this long-planned event was rather "invisible" to most Americans was not the fault, for the most part at least, of the organ-



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THE 'INVISIBLE' INTERNATIONAL WAR TRIBUNAL

isers.

True, billing the event as an "international tribunal" when in fact it was more akin to a kind of intellectual international demonstration designed to condemn both the US-led war and its prosecution, in a sense gave a kind of excuse to the media for not paying any attention to it.

But excuses aside, the "invisibility" of the International War Crimes Tribunal was more a sign of the times than anything else, more a reflection of a basic polarisation within American society.

Others would say of course, and they too would have a point, that a lot has to do with the relative political and financial impotence of those who hold the views and the passions of those who organised this event, of those who have the audacity to put their own country on trial for war crimes even while the UN in a sense sanctioned American efforts.

Bertrand Russell did things like this back in the 1960s. But then there was an ongoing war in Indochina, a protest that took place through a multi-year build-up, and a lot of other factors not present this time around.

Now in the 1990s the man most identified with this exceedingly outspoken opposition to US policies, the man whose very name is coming to personify a certain alternative political vision, indeed the man who acted as "prosecutor" for this War Crimes Tribunal, is none less than a former attorney general of the United States — Ramsey Clark.