Deport Karl Linnas To the Soviet Union

By Menachem Z. Rosensaft

Karl Linnas, onetime commandant of a Nazi concentration camp, is alive and well in America. By all rights, he should be in the Soviet Union, where he has been tried and sentenced to death in absentia as a war criminal. However, because of efforts on his behalf by an improbable coalition that includes his ultraliberal lawyer — the former Attorney General Ramsey Clark — and the conservative former White House director of communications, Patrick J. Buchanan, Mr. Linnas may live out his days in freedom.

Mr. Linnas, a Long Island resident, is a brutal murderer. He is one of thousands of Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians and other nationals who enthusiastically helped Germans implement Hitler’s “Final Solution” of the “Jewish question.” As chief of the Tartu concentration camp in Estonia in 1941 and 1942, he directed and participated in numerous mass executions of Jewish men, women and children. The Federal Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit determined that the case against him had been firmly proved. It said his wartime activities “were such as to offend the decency of any civilized society.”

Mr. Linnas never had any right to enter, let alone become a citizen of, the United States. In applying for admission, he concealed his World War II exploits and on at least two occasions falsely swore he had “never advanced in the persecution of any person because of his race, religion or national origin.”

In 1981, Mr. Linnas was stripped of his citizenship, and recently after years of legal proceedings the United States Supreme Court decided not to take his case, clearing the way for deportation. Still, it is uncertain whether he will be brought to justice.

So far, Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d has refused to sign the deportation papers. In February, before leaving the White House, Mr. Buchanan publicly urged Mr. Meese to meet with representatives of rightwing Eastern European émigré groups for whom the anti-Communist Karl Linnas was a hero and who desperately want to keep him here. Not long ago Mr. Meese acknowledged that he had given Mr. Linnas’s lawyer and supporters time to find some other country that would offer him sanctuary. Indeed, Mr. Clark said the Justice Department is actively helping in the search.

Several dozen governments reportedly have refused to accept Mr. Linnas. However, the danger remains that a fascist or neo-fascist dictator such as Chile’s Augusto Pinochet or Paraguay’s Alfredo Stroessner might give him a safe, comfortable retirement home. Both countries have opened their gates to far more infamous Nazi fugitives.

As the son of two survivors of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, I am outraged by Mr. Meese’s reluctance to see Mr. Linnas punished. For Mr. Meese to encourage the convicted war criminal’s friends in their ill-conceived attempts to save his skin violates the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. And if any American official or functionary has actually intervened on Mr. Linnas’s behalf in any way, a Congressional investigation into such an impropriety would seem in order.

Once again, the Administration is demonstrating an utter insensitivity toward Nazi Germany’s crimes against humanity. In 1983, President Reagan shocked the international community and grievously offended Holocaust survivors and their families when he described the S.S. officers and soldiers buried at the Bitburg cemetery in West Germany as “victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps.”

And insisted on honoring their memory. Clearly, the spirit of Bitburg continues to fester.

Messrs. Reagan, Meese and Buchanan simply do not understand that there can be no compromises or accommodations with any vestige of the Third Reich. To be sure, Mr. Buchanan’s oft-expressed sympathy for a host of Nazi criminals — which may well be shared by others in the Administration — is a constitutionally protected perversion. Fortunately, this attitude does not reflect official policy. Thus, whatever his personal feelings, Attorney General Meese must enforce the law by ordering the prompt deportation of Karl Linnas to the Soviet Union. Anything less would blatantly mock justice.