

The Case of the Altered Notebooks: Part IV

In another colorful round in the "Imanishi-Kari case," Secret Service agents again testified that notes and tapes had been altered

THERE WERE CHARGES and countercharges and references to anonymous scientists who spotted bogus data but were afraid to come forward. There were allegations of fraud and of McCarthyism. There was a decision to turn evidence over to the U.S. attorney for possible criminal prosecution. It was all in a week's work for Representative John D. Dingell (D-MI) in the case of Tufts University researcher Thereza Imanishi-Kari.

One year ago this month, Dingell held hearings on allegations that Imanishi-Kari falsified data that were published in 1986 in *Cell* in a paper coauthored by Nobel laureate David Baltimore. The dramatic highlight of those hearings was surprise testimony by agents of the U.S. Secret Service who had done a forensic analysis of Imanishi-Kari's notebooks that revealed "altered" dates on notebook pages from experiments conducted while she was at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Imanishi-Kari explained it away as poor record-keeping, not fraud. "I am not a neat person," she readily admitted to Dingell (*Science*, 12 May 1989, p. 643).

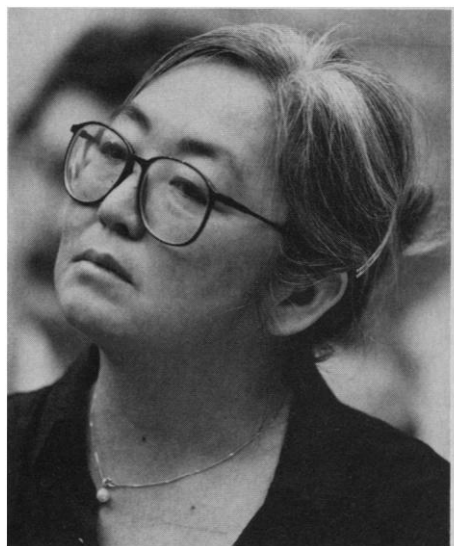
This week it was "déjà vu all over again" when Dingell held another hearing (so far there have been four) and the Secret Service testified again.

Secret Service agents reported that additional forensic analysis suggested that the purported dates on gamma counter tapes in her notebooks "are not consistent with experiments having been performed by other researchers on or around those dates."

A specific example: Larry F. Stewart, one of two Secret Service agents who went to MIT to examine gamma counters, testified that Imanishi-Kari's notes showed two printouts of data that reportedly had been run 1 day apart in March 1985. But, said Stewart, neither one was "authentic."

Stewart and Secret Service agent John W. Hargett testified that one could conclude that about one-third of the material in the notebooks "is false."

"Not true," Imanishi-Kari declared during a jammed press conference in the hallway outside the hearing room. She is adamant in saying that her data are valid even though she admits that it is impossible to pin down what the dates on her notebook



"Not important." Thereza Imanishi-Kari insists the data are valid.

pages mean. "The dates are not important to the research," she told *Science*. Her attorney, Bruce A. Singal, said that the Secret Service's report was "shoddy work."

But Dingell hinted at further evidence, which he described this way: "A number of prominent scientists, under a promise of confidentiality, examined the suspect notebook and agreed that it was obviously bogus. But these same scientists were unwilling to advance their professional opinions in public for fear of the disapproval of their colleagues. This reluctance . . . to deal fully and frankly with the problem of scientific fraud and misconduct has greatly complicated not only the present investigation, but others as well," Dingell asserted.

Adding to the drama, during the impromptu press conference, a woman at the back of the crowd challenged Imanishi-Kari's statements. Saying at first only that "I am a scientist," she then identified herself as Joanne Delenick of Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. Although she apparently has seen the notebooks which are in Dingell's hands, sources say she is not one of the scientists to whom the congressman referred in his formal remarks.

The drama of this week's hearing actually began a week before it was held.

Monday, 7 May. Dingell sends a fax to

Singal, announcing a public hearing the following Monday and inviting Imanishi-Kari to appear. Included is a copy of the Secret Service report that will form the basis for the hearing.

Wednesday, 9 May. Dingell staffers notify the press that the hearing is scheduled.

Thursday, 10 May. Singal calls the Secret Service report "nothing less than a sham" and is furious at the short notice. He says Imanishi-Kari will not testify.

Singal flies to Washington with Imanishi-Kari to talk to the press and "protest in the loudest terms the injustices and indignities" of Dingell's way of doing business. It is a takeoff on a technique Baltimore used last year when he presented his side of the story to the press a couple of days in advance of the hearing in Congress. Singal says his client will be happy to testify if only Dingell will respond to a 24-item request for documents and fine-honed allegations.

Monday, 14 May. The hearing.

Dingell has not responded to Singal's request. Imanishi-Kari attends the hearing, sitting with Singal in the public seats. Three of her students are there too, passing out a letter that says Dingell has "under the shroud of congressional immunity, carried out a McCarthyistic witchhunt."

When the Secret Service testimony is over, there is a surprise witness: Suzanne Hadley of the National Institutes of Health Office of Scientific Integrity. Her office has been conducting an investigation of the case since last year's hearings and Imanishi-Kari has met with NIH officials on three occasions. After that, attorney Singal told her that enough was enough. Taking the same tack he took with Dingell, he said Imanishi-Kari would not meet with NIH again until Hadley's office submitted specific points of evidence to which he could respond.

At the hearing, Hadley is asked if Imanishi-Kari has "cooperated" with NIH. No, says Hadley. "We have made a number of requests for cooperation that have not been honored." Singal later calls Hadley's testimony "outrageous."

Whatever the case, everyone's patience is strained. Representative Ron Wyden (D-OR), the only other congressman present, suggests that Imanishi-Kari may have committed perjury when she testified before the Dingell committee a year ago. The whole matter, Wyden says, should be turned over to the U.S. attorney's office for possible criminal prosecution. Dingell concurs and gavel the hearing to a close.

Singal, himself a former U.S. attorney, says, "This is the furthest thing from a criminal case I've ever seen."

The saga is far from over.

■ BARBARA J. CULLITON