

# JEREMIAH O'LEARY: 'Fed up with insinuations'

Star reporter Jeremiah O'Leary's name surfaced in news stories concerning D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy's charge two weeks ago that certain reporters covering the House Assassinations Committee might be CIA agents in disguise. O'Leary's response, delayed by personal illness, follows.)

In November 1973, *The Star* executed an act of faith with its readers by formally asking the CIA if any *Star* reporters were or ever had been agents of the intelligence agency.

The inquiry was made in connection with *The Star's*

development of a story on the press's links with the CIA. I had no knowledge of it until the reporter involved had completed his research.

CIA Director William E. Colby had agreed to answer any question a newspaper asked about itself, but not about other papers. That seemed fair enough, and the questions were laid on him.

Has any *Star* reporter ever accepted any fee, wage or recompense for doing any job for the CIA? Colby said none had. Had any *Star* reporter accepted a plane ride or any other kind of gift from the CIA for any reason? Colby said

none had. Had any *Star* reporter voluntarily and without pay done any service or assignment for the CIA, in this country or abroad? Colby said no.

Are any *Star* reporters in your files at CIA? Colby was asked. The answer came back, "Yes. There is one name in our files. Jeremiah O'Leary." I wasn't present when this statement was made but I have been told by the editors and reporter working on the story that Colby gave every assurance that my name was in the files for no reason affecting my ethics or independence as a journalist.

Even so, my editors were surprised, as well they might be, because in 1973 it was not generally known that the CIA kept files on American citizens, especially journalists. And in an office conference with me, they wanted to know why. I said I didn't know for sure but that I could make an educated guess.

In the 1960s I was covering Cuban exile activities, the near-intervention in Haiti in 1963, the Kennedy assassinations, the civil rights murders in the South and other national news stories. I needed sources at the FBI and CIA and I finally made a good breakthrough at CIA. For two years, this CIA man introduced me to others who had solid information on subjects I was covering, mainly in Latin America.

I received a score of briefings at Langley. Station chiefs were alerted when I was on a tour of Latin America and gave me country briefings. I got to know scores of CIA officers. Some became good friends, some remained only acquaintances. I had lunch with them in every capital of the region except Havana. Sometimes I paid the bill; sometimes they paid. I have been to their homes and they have been to mine.

(I also eat regularly with the KGB, the Czechs, the Romanians, the Germans, the Swedes, the Nepalese, the Finns, the Irish, the

Greeks, the Turks, the Cypriots and so forth. I even split a check with an FBI man sometimes.)

To make a long story short, I told my editors I had used the CIA as a source of news and that the only way to cover the place was to get to know the people.

I then gave my solemn word, my oath, that I was not then and never had been an operative, tool or agent for the CIA and had never accepted anything from any of its people beyond a standard lunch or dinner. The editors looked relieved and one of them said, "Good." I was told *The Star* was about to run the story (it appeared on page one Nov. 30) about other journalists (unnamed) that have been paid CIA agents.

I was then asked, "Jerry, do you have any objection if we use your name?" I said, "Not if the story makes clear I've never worked for the CIA in any way."

That was my big mistake. I should have shouted, "No!" so loudly it could have been heard on Pennsylvania Avenue because that story has come back to haunt me time and time again over the past three years. Every crackpot assassination buff with another book to sell, every magazine writer with a conspiracy piece in his craw, every embassy in Washington with a pair of scissors, has clipped that one story and I have lost count of the

number of times it's been reprinted.

I will not permit questions about my sources, CIA or otherwise, relying on the protection afforded by the First Amendment. I will state under oath anywhere in the land that I have never been of or with the CIA.

But on and on the aspersions go.

The latest purveyor of the 1973 story is D.C. Del. Walter E. Fauntroy, who wants to subject reporters covering the House Assassinations Committee to an investigation to find out if they are CIA agents. Mark Lane, in his latest assassination book, cites the 1973 story in unflattering remarks about me — which I suppose is fair enough since I am no admirer of Lane or his role as assassination buff.

But I suspect Lane knows exactly what he is doing — especially that the revelations about my presence in CIA files were revealed by *The Star* itself. I suspect Fauntroy has gotten into deeper waters than he intended and was steered there by cleverly phrased sections of Lane's new book about the Martin Luther King assassination.

It may be well at this point to note that one of the reasons *The Star* printed my name in the 1973 story was to prompt other responsible newspapers to ask Colby about their own staffs. I do not know what came of this. If *The Post*, *Times* and other papers did inquire, they must have found their staffers in the files with me. There is not a news bureau in Washington that does not ask for and

get CIA briefings here and abroad.

It's been going on for years and there's nothing wrong with it.

But how I am fed up with the insinuations, sly hints and carefully worded charges that I am, or ever was, a CIA operative.

Walter Fauntroy, Mark Lane or anyone else who states for publication anywhere that I have ever worked for the CIA, with or without salary, or that I have been or am an agent or operative, can expect to hear from my attorney.

But speak up, gentlemen. Don't go hinting around the bush. Say your piece or shut up, because you're sounding an awful lot like Joe McCarthy.

George Beveridge

## Distortions that persist

Nothing is worse in the newspaper world than the printed distortion that falsely or unfairly wrongs someone in the news. When such things occur the harm can be irreparable, for the truth rarely catches up with the lie.

*Star* staff writer Jeremiah O'Leary's article above involves distortion of another sort that is no less insidious: The case in which the facts of a legitimate news story become twisted to imply, from then on, something altogether different.

The victims, equally helpless in either instance, are seldom newspaper people. But the O'Leary incident has all the classic consequences of the distortion, once instilled, that won't go away. The essential points are these:

● On Nov. 30, 1973, *The Star* disclosed in an exclusive front-page story that the CIA had some three dozen American journalists working abroad as undercover informants, some as "full-time agents."

● The second paragraph said a review of CIA files had disclosed the names of "some 40" news people who regularly supplied information to field agents "and who are regularly paid for their services." From there the story dealt at length with the CIA's reported plans to sever certain relationships with the press, to retain others.

● One that would not be

severed, the story said, involved "many reporters . . . who maintain regular contact with CIA officials in the routine performance of their journalistic duties. No money changes hands under these relationships," the story said. "Each side understands that the other is pursuing only his own tasks."

● The story then disclosed that the CIA includes in that category Jeremiah O'Leary, "whose name apparently found its way into agency files as a result of contacts of this professional type."

Complaints on *The Star's* performance should be directed to Ombudsman George Beveridge by phone at 484-4293 or in writing to *The Washington Star*, 225 Virginia Avenue S.E., Washington, D.C. 20061.

Well, that's what the Nov. 30, 1973, story said. Now refer to Page 232 of author Mark Lane's new book on the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination, *Code Name 'Zorro'*. The last paragraph on that page starts this way:

"On Nov. 30, 1973, it was revealed that the CIA had forty full-time news reporters on the CIA payroll as undercover informants, some of them as full-time agents." O.K., so far.

Then Lane's next paragraph:

"In 1973, the American

press was able to secure just two of the forty names in the CIA file of journalists. *The Washington Star* and *The Washington Post* reported that one of the two was Jeremiah O'Leary."

Got it? How's that for an instant transfer, implied at least, from "file" to "payroll"?

Now I know nothing more than you have read here or elsewhere in the press about the King assassination, O'Leary's actual relationships with the CIA or, for that matter, the Lane-O'Leary mutual admiration society.

But I do know that what that 1973 *Star* story said about O'Leary's name having turned up in the CIA "files" had nothing whatever to do with the CIA payroll or 40 CIA "undercover informants." Or with Del. Walter Fauntroy's allusions to 1973 CIA "disclosures" in reference to O'Leary.

Should *The Star*, given the context, have omitted from its 1973 story the information that O'Leary's name had turned up in CIA files?

You can argue it both ways. My feeling is that the newspaper was obliged, in the proper context, to print it.

But I feel for O'Leary's angry, frustrated cry of foul at the out-of-context consequences of that decision — and not because he's a friend or a newsmen.

Such things can happen, and do, to anyone.