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Al Lowenstein's Tangled Legacy

A New Book's Controversial Assertions
Provoke Anger and a Spirited Defense

By Myra MacPherson
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Five years ago this month a lifetime of political activism ended when Allard K. Lowenstein was murdered by a deranged former protégé. Dennis Sweeney, one of thousands of followers Lowenstein had collected in his years as civil rights and antiwar activist, walked into Lowenstein's office and fired seven bullets, five of which entered Lowenstein's body. More than 3,000 attended Lowenstein's funeral and heard praise for Lowenstein from such disparate voices as William F. Buckley Jr. and Sen. Edward Kennedy. Said Kennedy, "He was our brother."

Now comes "The Pied Piper: Allard Lowenstein and the Liberal Dream," published today by Grove Press, a book that has enraged Lowenstein's friends, family and many of the prominent figures who are named in the book.

The biography, by Richard Cummings, a 47-year-old lawyer and sometime academic, breathlessly claims to contain the "stunning truth" about Lowenstein—"he worked for the CIA in Africa and Spain and informed on suspected Communists in the civil rights movement in Mississippi." The claim, though, is made on the basis of cryptic diary notes, unnamed "intelligence sources" and speculation presented as fact.

"The Pied Piper" is, at the least, another publishing controversy in a period that has seen a biography of heiress Barbara Hutton recalled, a biography of Francis Cardinal Spellman changed in galleys to remove references to alleged homosexuality and a book on moral philosophy canceled because its author supplied a bogus letter of endorsement. But to many friends and associates of Lowenstein, "The Pied Piper" is above all an assault on truth and a dead man's reputation.

Outrage over the book and its thesis has poured forth in sworn affidavits, compiled in a remarkable document as large as a telephone book, denouncing the book as "hopelessly inaccurate," replete with falsehoods, innuendo and "baseless charges" about a man who cannot defend himself. No attempts have been made to enjoin the book. Ron Tabak, the lawyer who prepared the affidavits, says it would be a betrayal of Lowenstein's respect for the First Amendment to attempt to censor any book.

However, the complainants are "considering litigation to bring out all the critical evidence." They charge that any damage to Lowenstein's reputation may disillusion those who followed him and hurt the fund-raising activities of the Allard K. Lowenstein Fund, which carries on his work. They also recognize a hapless dilemma; their campaign to "bring out the truth" may "create additional publicity" for a book they despise.

Lowenstein, a one-term congressman, became best known for his leadership of the "Dump Johnson" movement during the Viet-

See CUMMINGS, B2, Col. 4



BY HARRY NALTCHAYAN—THE WASHINGTON POST
Richard Cummings, author of "The Pied Piper": "I stand by my book."

Lowenstein

CUMMINGS, From BI

nam era. In a time when rage and rhetoric were in fashion, Lowenstein was revered for his intellectual honesty, for his passionate commitment to a civil and human rights activism that stretched from the University of North Carolina to the United Nations. He counted among his friends and acquaintances many of the leading political figures of the postwar generation, liberal and conservative.

Cummings is adamant about his conclusions. The CIA charge? They come from "anonymous sources"; in an interview, Cummings says he can reveal nothing about them. Informing during the civil rights movement? Cummings interprets a single Lowenstein diary entry but cannot say what names were revealed to whom.

Indeed, one searches in vain for documents or even supporting corroboration for the allegations Cummings makes. His book frequently leaps to assertions of fact on the basis of Lowenstein's associations with people, such as the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., who in fact did work for the CIA. Often, when Cummings is unable to explain how Lowenstein was supporting himself, he concludes that the CIA was in the woodpile.

Cummings, a Princeton graduate with environmentalist interests, says he set out to write a favorable book on Lowenstein immediately after his death. He had a first draft written, he says, when his unnamed sources heard about the project and came up with the CIA connection. Cummings said it was back to the drawing board—for more writing and research. As a liberal, he was "stricken" with what he found, says Cummings, a curly-haired man who speaks in italics.

"This guy Cummings is really a garbage man, and that's my quote," says Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), one of those named in the book. "He has learned that dead men bring no defamation suits."

The 'Evidence'

"Cummings talked to honest people, who cooperated fully with him," remarks Harvard law professor Gary Bellow, a longtime Lowenstein friend. "Some were willing to entertain the possibility which Cummings suggested about Al and the CIA. After all, those were crazy times. They were astounded to find out that any speculations they had were presented as factual evidence." Others say that Cummings did not use their assertions that Lowenstein was never with the CIA. Cummings' response: "I stand by my book."

"If Al were with the CIA, why

would he have spent several years suing the FBI and trying to get his FBI and CIA files under the Freedom of Information Act?" says Bellow. "He was convinced he'd been under surveillance." In the late 1970s, Bellow went to CIA headquarters in Lowenstein's behalf to try again. Some portions of Lowenstein's file were read aloud to him. "Some of them described Al as 5-foot-10, fat and with red hair," Bellow chuckles. Lowenstein was short, dark and thin.

Cummings says, "Bellow hid these files from me." Bellow and others assert that they were in Lowenstein's private paper collections at the University of North Carolina when Cummings was perusing them.

"In addition to his wild leaps of logic," says Tabak, "he was a sloppy researcher."

Cummings now points to a 1962 CIA document he just received (not included in the book) as proof positive that Lowenstein was in the CIA: "subject, reportedly, has stated that he has done some work for the CIA." However files from subsequent years show that Lowenstein was being watched on his overseas trips. Cummings' explanation is that he had a "cryptograph" and only a few in the CIA knew he was working for them, therefore those surveillance memos should be discounted.

Tabak says, laughing, "Why is one CIA document proof positive and the others false?" And Bellow adds, "If the CIA files show anything it was that Lowenstein [described in one report as a "troublemaker"] was under their surveillance."

Cummings repeatedly tries to establish the CIA connection by linking Lowenstein with friends who had been with the agency. Bellow scathingly calls it "guilt by association." While recruiting students to come south for the Mississippi voter registration project in 1964, Lowenstein worked with "people who had been affiliated with the CIA or had participated in CIA-sponsored projects," writes Cummings. "Barney Frank at Harvard had been with the Independent Research Service delegation to Helsinki, an operation which, by Frank's own admission, he clearly understood was CIA backed."

Frank says today, "I was involved in the Helsinki conference and guessed at it [being CIA backed]. But Al had nothing to do with it." Those were cold-warrior times, 1962, a different era, when the best and the brightest on campus were often drawn to the CIA. Still, Frank says, "Al had nothing to do with it. This book is an outrage. This Cummings has a view that if you're a liberal you're not supposed to be anticommunist, as Al was, so therefore Al *must* have been in the CIA."

Cummings asserts as fact that Lowenstein was with the CIA and takes pains to point out that William F. Buckley "also served in the CIA." Buckley—the last person to think



ALLARD K. LOWENSTEIN

there was something wrong with being in the CIA—nonetheless states in the anti-“Pied Piper” document, “Those of us who knew his character, and I was one of them, would feel safe in saying that the very idea is preposterous. I draw on a transcendent knowledge of Lowenstein: this is not the kind of thing he’d have done.” Cummings replies, “Oh well, Buckley relies on ‘transcendent knowledge.’ I don’t know what he relies on on the mundane level.”

After portions of the book appeared in an Evergreen article, Harris Wofford, President Kennedy’s special assistant for civil rights and former associate director of the Peace Corps, who knew Lowenstein for 25 years, wrote Cummings a letter, saying, “Everything . . . which you use as evidence of Al being an agent of the CIA is twisted, or turned upside down, or just plain untrue.” Cummings says he stands by the quotes—and that they are on tape.

In his book, Cummings flatly asserts that Lowenstein was kept out of the Peace Corps because he was tied to the CIA. As evidence, he cites Wofford’s speculation that Lowenstein might have given the CIA his views and urged the policies he favored—and Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver’s adamancy about keeping anyone with CIA contacts out of the Corps. Therefore, Wofford speculated, *if* Lowenstein were involved with the CIA and *if* he had been turned down, that could be an explanation.

Cummings then concludes: “And since Lowenstein was not able to work for the Peace Corps, Wofford’s speculation on Lowenstein’s association with the CIA is tantamount to a confirmation of it.”

Wofford says, “There is absolutely no logic to that interpretation of what I said,” and points out that the logical person to tell Cummings the truth is Shriver.

In an interview, Cummings is asked if he ever contacted Shriver about his flat assertion. “No. Perhaps I should have.”

Had he done so, Cummings would have found out what Shriver said when asked about it yesterday: “I

have no memory whatsoever of any discussion about Al applying to the Peace Corps and being turned down for *any* reason whatsoever.” His then-deputy, Warren Wiggins, adds, “The way the Peace Corps was run in those days is Sarge or myself or both would have passed on that appointment. I have no memory whatsoever of it coming up and that’s the kind of thing I would have remembered.”

Proving a negative is difficult—and far more so in the clandestine world of the CIA. However Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the permanent select committee on intelligence, talked with CIA officials about Lowenstein. “. . . Based on representations made to me,” Hamilton writes, “I can say that Mr. Lowenstein was *never* an agent of the CIA.”

Informing

“LOWENSTEIN DIARIES, REVEAL ROLE AS INFORMER IN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.”

So blares the headline of one of the many press releases on “The Pied Piper.” In a long section detailing internecine warfare in the civil rights movement, Cummings states something that is not new—Lowenstein and the far left often clashed over the possibility of Communist infiltration in the movement.

“But that’s a far leap to say he informed on them,” says Bellow. Cummings uses a few notations in Lowenstein’s shorthand diary to say that he informed on suspected communist infiltrators. Lowenstein’s notes are in headline fashion, as if on the front of a newspaper: “‘Wrong’ Decisions and ‘Wrong’ Group Making Them Combine to End ‘Deep’ Commitment; Problem Rises of Who to Tell How Much. Campus Center Leaders in Mixed Role. Obligation to Keep Them Informed Called ‘Great’ But Particularly on Question of ‘Infiltration’ Dilemma Is Acute and Has Not Been Solved.”

Cummings is asked how the obligation to “Keep Them Informed” makes Lowenstein out to be an informer. “I’m taking him at his word. He also says he has a list of people ‘to be examined.’ That’s powerful stuff.”

So who was he keeping informed? “That’s a good question. I don’t know.”

And the list of those to be examined? Where was that being sent? “My answer is I don’t know. I said he was an informer in Mississippi. I’m not saying to whom he is informing. But it’s got to be the FBI or CIA. It *has* to be. Or maybe *both*.”

Does he have any documentation? “No documentation.”

Hypothetical and circumstantial evidence? “Yes, but circumstantial evidence convicted Jeffrey MacDonald of murder. And this isn’t murder.”

So many who loved Lowenstein, it is hard to name them. One was Aaron Henry, black civil rights activist and member of the Mississippi state legislature who worked closely with Lowenstein in the ‘60s states in

his affidavit, "Mr. Cummings' assertion that Mr. Lowenstein was secretly spying on alleged Communists—whether for the CIA or anyone or anything else—is flatly incorrect. Mr. Lowenstein was a man of utmost integrity. It is completely irresponsible and outrageous for Mr. Cummings to base such a serious factual assertion on his misreading of those notes." Henry says Cummings did not seek to interview him. Cummings says he wrote him a letter and got no response.

The Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr. said yesterday, "Cummings certainly never talked to me about any of this. Al was always a little paranoid about anyone to the left of Al but he was very open about it." But he says Cummings' diary interpretations are "really misleading. Absolutely nothing about Al ever suggested he told government agents or anyone else about communist infiltration." Coffin, who was in the CIA from 1950 to 1953, is another person Cummings uses to support his view that Lowenstein was also with the agency. "Al certainly was never drawn to work with me because I had once been with the CIA," says Coffin. "It was that we had similar views. We never once even talked about the CIA."

Like many of Lowenstein's friends, Coffin is willing to speculate that he may have wittingly or unwittingly been involved with the CIA after agency links with the National Student Association became known. Writers have characterized Lowenstein, however, as the last NSA president (1950-51) before the CIA link, and Lowenstein always denied any knowledge of CIA funding.

Perhaps one footnote in the book best shows what Tabak calls Cummings' "leaps of logic": "People who worked with Lowenstein, Gerry Twombly explained, tended to take on his mannerisms. Twombly had a messy desk like Lowenstein, and folk singer Harry Chapin drove fast, the way Lowenstein did. Chapin would be killed in a car crash on the Long Island Expressway."

The Author

The point of his disputed revelations, says Cummings, is that "when you have a hidden agenda it means you consider yourself superior to the people you're working with. This is disturbing and dishonest in the kind of grass-roots politics Lowenstein symbolized. He set himself up as being antiestablishment and he was not. On one hand, Al wanted to be loved and revered by the people he was often criticizing. That's why I empathize with him. He's trying to be the assimilationist guy."

Richard Cummings was once named Richard Cohen. "I am Jewish, from Brooklyn. I had been at Princeton for four years at the peak of the most virulent anti-Semitism you can imagine, and, well, I went through this horrible experience. I graduated in

1959 and went to Columbia Law School. I decided in law school that I at least wasn't going to be discriminated against when I went to look for a job on Wall Street. e.e. cummings was my favorite poet so I took my bardic name."

As an example of Lowenstein's desire for the richer life, Cummings makes a major contention that a 1979 Lowenstein trip to Africa was financed by Harry Oppenheimer, South Africa's billionaire diamond king. Cummings characterizes Oppenheimer as a "key supporter of the white minority Nationalist government of South Africa."

"That is absurd," says a longtime civil rights activist who has known Oppenheimer for years. "He spent the last 30 years fighting apartheid and was one of the few who publicly opposed the new constitution in South Africa because it would create more rifts between blacks and whites." In the '60s, most of the 3,000 guests at his daughter's wedding were black. Sen. Kennedy visited Oppenheimer during his recent trip to Africa. And a few years ago Oppenheimer played host to black activist politician Andrew Young. Says Cummings, "I didn't know that."

South West Africa is where Lowenstein's CIA connections all began, says Cummings. He claims there was a "good wing" of the CIA that believed the way to fight communism overseas was by supporting liberal noncommunist groups against right-wing regimes. "My intelligence sources assert that Lowenstein," while on a 1959 trip to South Africa, smuggled South West African student Hans Beukes out of the country at the behest of the CIA. The purpose, states Cummings, was to have the student testify at the United Nations as part of a United States-backed effort to get South Africa to change its racial policies to defuse Soviet influence in Africa.

The two men alive who helped Lowenstein smuggle Beukes out, Emory Bundy and Stephen Bull, quite simply hoot at this theory. They point out that Beukes met them and pleaded and begged with them to smuggle him out. They were all skeptical of the mission and did so only after Beukes' urging. They relate a Keystone Cops version; renting a beat up Volkswagen and shoving Beukes down in the back while they crossed the border. Bundy says, "It's absolutely unbelievable for him to make a connection of the CIA behind an escape as stupid as the one we did. We had to borrow money from friends. You'd think Cummings would have asked me. He asked me about other things but not this."

Cummings contends that Bundy and Bull did not know the CIA had moved in on their escapade. "It was when they were off getting the car that the contact with Lowenstein was made," says Cummings.

How do you know?

"My source told me."