

Lowenstein and the CIA

By CHARLES KAISER

Only a few Central Intelligence Agency employees ever openly acknowledge whom they work for. The rest operate under so many kinds of cover that it has become commonplace to assume that almost anyone, in almost any profession, might be working for the agency.

After the congressional investigations of the 1970s revealed that the CIA had funneled money through myriad liberal organizations—ranging from the National Student Association to the Congress for Cultural Freedom—American liberals with past connections to these groups fell under particular suspicion.

Since the late Allard K. Lowenstein, a maverick U.S. congressman and an energetic liberal activist, was one of the first NSA presidents in 1951, it's not surprising that in his last years he was plagued by rumors about a possible CIA connection.

In "The Pied Piper: Allard K. Lowenstein and the Liberal Dream" (Grove Press, 569 pages, \$19.95) Long Island, N.Y., attorney and sometime liberal activist Richard Cummings traces Lowenstein's life from his birth to Jewish-Lithuanian immigrants in Newark, N.J., to his murder by a deranged former associate in 1980.

In between, Mr. Cummings cites dozens of incidents that supposedly prove Lowenstein worked on and off for the CIA for nearly three decades. The purported evidence ranges from Lowenstein's early association with the NSA to his stay at the Hilton Hotel in Madrid, Spain, at a time when he had no regular salary. But a careful reading of this book combined with interviews with the author make it clear that nowhere in "The Pied Piper" does Mr. Cummings provide any hard evidence to support his conspiracy theory.

This biography is the latest example of a syndrome that occasionally afflicts hard-cover publishers of all sizes. It is the willingness to publish controversial manuscripts that may sell well, even though they are based on largely unchecked or uncheckable "facts." One of last year's most regrettable examples of this genre was "Vengeance," a Simon & Schuster offering that was supposed to be the "true" story of an Israeli hit squad.

In Mr. Cummings's book, the crucial "sources" tend to be unidentified or unidentifiable, and the author frequently requires leaps of faith from his reader that are utterly unjustified by his evidence. For example: "Sources report that while Allard Lowenstein was in Johannesburg he was contacted by the CIA and asked to perform a mission that must have been highly appealing to his romantic side. . . ." The mission in question was an attempt to smuggle a South West African student out of his homeland. According to Mr. Cummings, this mission was ordered by the CIA. But in an interview he acknowledges that the "sources" of this information were really just one source, whom he identifies only as a retired Army Intelligence officer.

The retired officer has friends who

"served in the CIA with Mr. Lowenstein and say he served in the CIA as an expert for Southern Africa from 1962 to 1967," according to Mr. Cummings. But he can't disclose the names of these former CIA men because he never learned them. In fact, he has never spoken to them. In fact, he has never spoken to anyone who claimed firsthand knowledge that Lowenstein worked for the CIA.

Mr. Cummings's logic is at its most convoluted when he tries to show that Lowenstein had a connection to the agency while he was president of the NSA. Most authorities agree that CIA funds didn't start flowing to the student group until two years after Lowenstein's presidency. But Mr. Cummings concludes that "what ultimately became the CIA did, in fact, form the National Student Association."

The basis for this revelation is as follows: Lowenstein and others were encouraged to found a new student organization by "State Department observers" (as usual, identities unknown). There was no CIA at that time, but since Mr. Cummings regards the State Department as "part of the American intelligence establishment," he goes on to conclude that the then nascent CIA founded the NSA.

Lawyers for the Lowenstein family are busy amassing depositions from named sources who say their views were seriously misrepresented in this book. They also have a letter from Rep. Lee Hamilton, chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, in which he states that



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"The Pied Piper:
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"based on representations made to me, I can say that Mr. Lowenstein was never an agent of the CIA."

Five years before he was murdered, Lowenstein filed a Freedom of Information request for his CIA file. One document in it, which Mr. Cummings obtained just last week from Lowenstein's family's lawyers, says "subject [Lowenstein] reportedly has stated that he has done some work for CIA." Mr. Cummings has seized on this sentence as proof that Lowenstein did smuggle the student out at the CIA's request. Perhaps he did, but another cable from the same file, sent in 1963, identifies Lowenstein as "a troublemaker. . . . To our knowledge he represents no one but himself in spite of propensity for name dropping." There is always a chance that Mr. Cummings's improbable conspiracy theories are correct, but the facts he has presented here fall far short of proving them. A more serious investigator would have resisted such sweeping conclusions on the basis of such tenuous evidence.

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