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What Was the CIA Buying?

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Sooner or later (and the sooner the better) the inquiry into the secret subsidies of the Central Intelligence Agency must get to the critical but still obscured question of what the CIA was really doing or thought it was doing.

As of now, it is by no means clear what all those hidden millions went for. Nor, ignoring the ethical considerations, is it certain what the American taxpayer got in return for these questionable expenditures.

Presumably, the subsidies were an investment in protecting and advancing America's interest in the cold war, but if this was the mission there is little evidence so far to prove that it was successfully carried out.

On the contrary, much of the evidence that has emerged suggests that the end result of some of the larger CIA investments was actually to undermine U. S. foreign policy, although it is hard to believe that was the intent.

Former Sen. Barry Goldwater raises a legitimate question when he asks why the CIA has been financing "left wing" organizations but not conservative groups such as the Young Republicans. "Why didn't they spread this money around?" he says, and adds: "In other words what they have been doing with it, so far as I can see, is to finance socialism in America."

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Goldwater's conclusion appears to be wide of the mark, but he is on solid ground in wondering whether the CIA efforts were not sometimes self-defeating, or, as they say at Control, "counter-productive."

We need, for instance, the CIA's answer to a flat statement by Norman Thomas, the former leader of the U. S. Socialist Party, that, as head of another organization, he took large covert sums from the CIA but then spent part of them on anti-CIA activities.

The facts seem to be that the CIA funneled $1,000,000 into the Institute for International Labor while Thomas was the head of it. The money came from a secret CIA foundation; Thomas says he was unaware of the source, and that the present revelations leave him feeling like a "fool."

In any case, there seems reason to believe that the money was partly used against American policy in the Dominican Republic. Thomas says: "I made a compilation of criticism of CIA activity in the Dominican Republic. So it seems pretty clear that the CIA was paying for some of its own heaviest opposition." The CIA inquiry should also look into charges that the agency was subsidizing students who were trying to organize opposition to the Franco regime in Spain, a government with which we have the most sensitive defense arrangements.

Whatever individual Americans may think of Franco, it is official U. S. policy to support his government, not to help overthrow it. Nevertheless, the Franco press is now severely attacking the CIA for allegedly promoting dissension.

The press reaction is based on charges by an official of the International Students Conference that the so-called "democratic unions" of Spanish students had been financed by the CIA.

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What are we to make of all of this? Allen Dulles, the former director of the CIA, says, "We obtained what we wanted." But did we? You'd never know it from the statements of NSA leaders and officials of other organizations that got millions from the agency.

It has already been noted in Congress that the NSA backed admission of Communist China to the UN and opposed U. S. policy in Vietnam. Moreover, Congress has been asked to investigate "how much CIA money has been channeled to private organizations which was used for leftist purposes having nothing to do with the conduct of the cold war?"

Not many citizens are going to believe that the CIA is a secret left wing organization, but we are entitled to have some idea of what it is getting for our money, if anything.