

Part 5/29/78 *The CIA and the Press*

One and a half cheers for Phil Geyelin's May 21 Outlook article on CIA and the press. He is refreshingly sensible in reminding his colleagues in the media that it is up to them, and not the Congress, to police their CIA associations.

But Mr. Geyelin seems to have fallen victim to a media-created myth when he says that "a strong case has been made by an impressive array of . . . media spokesmen that the American news business has been so compromised" by a "hyperactive and insensitive CIA" that statutory prohibitions are required.

At the beginning of this year the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence held extensive hearings on this subject. Several of us who had served a number of years in the CIA testified that in fact we knew of no significant case in which news disseminated in the United States had been in any way contaminated by CIA involvement. The point was also made that we knew of no American journalist who had collaborated with CIA at the ex-

pense of his obligations to either his publisher or his public. In addition, in my testimony I said that while there was no significant evidence of CIA manipulation of the American press, there was substantial evidence of KGB activity in that regard. The dozen or so reporters from the major dailies, wire services and networks present during that testimony took notes and obtained copies of prepared statements, but apparently none of the above points were considered newsworthy by their editors.

Among the leading members of the media who testified next (and received extensive front-page attention by leading dailies) was Eugene Patterson, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He warned that CIA use of even foreign journalists "could lead to the death of the American dream." He neglected to explain how the American dream would be put in mortal jeopardy by CIA recruitment of a Tass correspondent. Nor did he or any of the other half-dozen witnesses from the media cite a specific case of either the contamination of news disseminated in the United States or corruption of an American journalist as a result of anything done by the CIA.

By its continued agitation and distortion of this issue, the press has, it seems to me, taken aim at a nonexistent target and succeeded only in shooting itself in the foot. It has cast suspicion of intelligence involvement on its own overseas representatives. It has raised doubts about the integrity of its own product. And it has created serious obstacles to continuation of the entirely

legitimate and ethical contact between its members and CIA representatives, which has proved mutually beneficial in the past.

But the solution to these problems does not lie in the statutory restrictions that some members of the media advocate. In large measure it lies in a less hysterical and more rational approach by the media itself. And in this connection one does not have to agree with all of Mr. Geyelin's points to applaud his comment that exchanges of information between CIA and the press "are not only well within the bounds of professional journalistic performance but also well beyond the bounds of statutory regulation."

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