

# Lessons of the CIA Mess

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Practically no one, from the Administration on down, comes out of the current Central Intelligence Agency flap looking good. Though it is too early to assess the damage, it is plainly considerable. The CIA has again been confirmed in its role as fall guy and fair game for rebels and antestabishmentarians of every stripe.

Actually, the agency has done pretty well at what it is supposed to do: produce intelligence. Its blunders—the Bay of Pigs, for example—have been heavily publicized, while its triumphs in what Secretary Rusk calls the “back-alley’s war” have necessarily gone unsung. Without the CIA’s dogged and ingenious work the U.S. would know less and be in a far shakier position in the world today.

Its function as aid and comfort to assorted honest but indigent causes, on the other hand, is questionable in the extreme.

Considering the CIA’s reputation, it is surprising that many of the organizations it has covertly supported tend to be liberal (even a project under Norman Thomas got funds). Some of the activities are so spectacularly worthwhile in themselves that almost the only way to discredit them would be by associating them with intelligence operations. It is reasonable to ask how this was permitted to happen.

Fifteen years ago the political climate in Washington was such that the easiest way to feed government funds into certain projects (such as sending student delegations abroad) was by subterfuge. Congress was in no mood to give the money openly. The CIA being in the subterfuge business, the Administration appointed it bagman. Subsequently, the CIA took advantage of its position in some cases to recruit agents and otherwise use the dependent groups.

Not everyone was so abused. But now that the whole thing is blown, everyone involved has been compromised.

The CIA may be faulted for doing a job that it shouldn’t have been doing in the first place, and for doing it much too long. However, the root blame is not with the agency but with the hypocritical American unwillingness to see certain types of individuals or activities lose their “amateur” status even when they cannot afford it. All for the sake of preserving a myth of independence, the officers of a large number of groups, to say nothing of four Presidents and a host of public officials, have found it necessary to countenance an extraordinary degree of deviousness. The Central Intelligence Agency should stick to intelligence and let other government agencies, on an open basis, bankroll the good works.