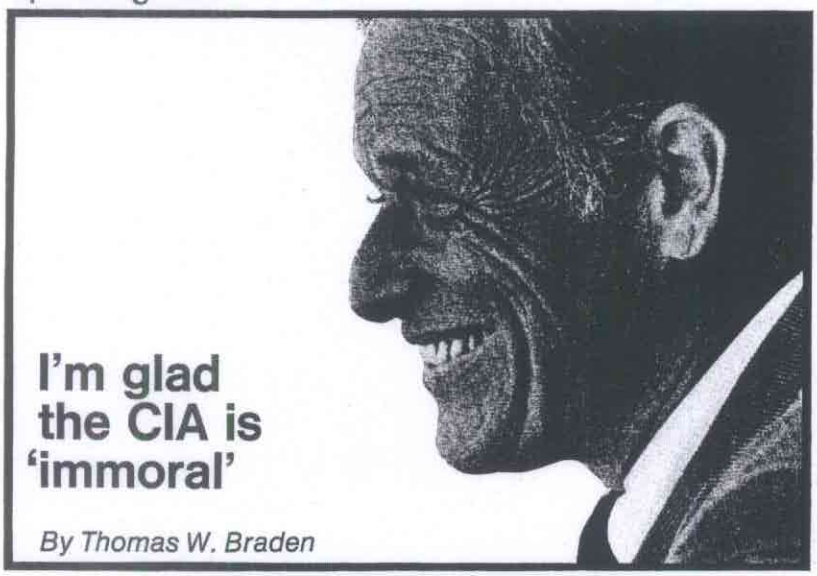

I'm glad the CIA is 'immoral'

By Thomas W. Braden

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On the desk in front of me as I write these lines is a creased and faded yellow paper. It bears the following inscription in pencil:

"Received from Warren G. Haskins, $15,000. (signed) Norris A. Grambo."

I went in search of this paper on the day the newspapers disclosed the "scandal" of the Central Intelligence Agency's connections with American students and labor leaders. It was a wistful search, and when it ended, I found myself feeling sad.

For I was Warren G. Haskins. Norris A. Grambo was Irving Brown, of the American Federation of Labor. The $15,000 was from the vaults of the CIA, and the piece of yellow paper is the last memento I possess of a vast and secret operation whose death has been brought about by small-minded and resentful men.

It was my idea to give the $15,000 to Irving Brown. He needed it to pay off his strong-arm squads in Mediterranean ports, so that American supplies could be unloaded against the opposition of Communist dock workers. It was also my idea to give cash, along with advice, to other labor leaders, to students, professors and others who could help the United States in its battle with Communist fronts.

It was my idea. For 17 years I had thought it was a good idea. Yet here it was in the newspapers, buried under excoriation. Walter Lippmann. Joseph Kraft. Editorials. Outrage. Shock.

"What's gone wrong?" I said to myself as I looked at the yellow paper. "Was there something wrong with me and the others back in 1950? Did we just think we were helping our country, when in fact we ought to have been hauled up before Walter Lippmann?

"And what's wrong with me now? For I still think it was and is a good idea, an imperative idea. Am I out of my mind? Or is it the editor of *The New York Times* who is talking nonsense?"

And so I sat sadly amidst the dust of old papers, and after a time I decided something. I decided that if ever I knew a truth in my life, I knew the truth of the cold war, and I knew what the Central Intelligence Agency did in the cold war, and never have I read such a concatenation of inane, misinformed twaddle as I have now been reading about the CIA.

Were the undercover payments by the CIA "immoral"? Surely it cannot be "immoral" to make certain that your country's supplies intended for delivery to friends are not burned, stolen or dumped into the sea.

Are CIA efforts to collect intelligence anywhere it can "disgraceful"? Surely it is not "disgraceful" to ask somebody whether he learned anything while he was abroad that might help his country.

People who make these charges must be naïve. Some of them must be worse. Some must be pretending to be naïve.

Take Victor Reuther, assistant to his brother Walter, president of the United Automobile Workers. According to Drew Pearson, Victor Reuther complained that the American Federation of Labor got money from the CIA and spent it with "undercover techniques." Victor Reuther ought to be ashamed of himself. At his request, I went to Detroit one morning and gave Walter $50,000 in $50 bills. Victor spent the money, mostly in West Germany, to bolster labor unions there. He tried "undercover techniques" to keep me from finding out how he spent it. But I had my own "undercover techniques." In my opinion and that of my peers in the CIA, he spent it with less than perfect wisdom, for the German unions he chose to help weren't seriously short of money and were already anti-Communist. The CIA money Victor spent would have done much more good where unions were tying up ports at the order of Communist leaders.

As for the theory advanced by the editorial writers that there ought to have been a Government foundation devoted to helping good causes agreed upon by Congress—this may seem sound, but it wouldn't work for a minute. Does anyone really think that congressmen would foster a foreign tour by an artist who has or has had left-wing connections? And imagine the scuffles that would break out as congressmen fought over money to subsidize the organizations in their home districts.

Back in the early 1950's, when the cold war was really hot, the idea that Congress would have approved many of our projects was about as likely as the John Birch Society's approving Medicare. I remember, for example, the time I tried to bring my old friend, Paul-Henri Spaak of Belgium, to the U.S. to help out in one of the CIA operations.

Paul-Henri Spaak was and is a very wise man. He had served his country as foreign minister and premier. CIA Director Allen Dulles mentioned Spaak's projected journey to the then Senate Majority Leader William F. Knowland of California. I believe that Mr. Dulles thought the senator would like to meet Mr. Spaak. I am sure he was not prepared for Knowland's reaction:

"Why," the senator said, "the man's a socialist."

"Yes," Mr. Dulles replied, "and the head of his party. But you don't know Europe the way I do, Bill. In many European countries, a socialist is roughly equivalent to a Republican." Knowland replied, "I don't care. We aren't going to bring any socialists over here."

The fact, of course, is that in much of Europe in the 1950's, socialists, people who called themselves "left"—the very people whom many Americans thought no better than Communists—were the only people who gave a damn about fighting Communism.

But let us begin at the beginning.

When I went to Washington in 1950 as assistant to Allen W. Dulles, then deputy director to CIA chief Walter Bedell Smith, the agency was three years old. It had been organized, like the State Department, along geographical lines, with a Far Eastern Division, a Western European Division, etc. It seemed to me that this organization was not capable of defending the United States against a new and extraordinarily successful weapon. The weapon was the international Communist front. There were seven of these fronts, all immensely powerful:

1. The International Association of Democratic Lawyers had found "documented proof" that U.S. forces in Korea were dropping canisters of poisoned mosquitoes on North Korean cities and were following a "systematic procedure of torturing civilians, individually and en masse."

2. The World Peace Council had conducted a successful operation called the Stockholm Peace Appeal, a petition signed by more than two million Americans. Most of them, I hope, were in ignorance of the council's program: "The peace movement . . . has set itself the aim to frustrate the aggressive plans of American and English imperialists. . . . The heroic Soviet army is the powerful sentinel of peace."

3. The Women's International Democratic Federation was preparing a Vienna conference of delegates from 40 countries who resolved: "Our children cannot be safe until American warmongers are silenced." The meeting cost the Russians six million dollars.

4. The International Union of Students had the active participation of nearly every student organization in the world. At an estimated cost of $50 million a year, it stressed the hopeless future of the young under any form of society except that dedicated to peace and freedom, as in Russia.

5. The World Federation of Democratic Youth appealed to the nonintellectual young. In 1951, 25,000

One measure of a democracy's strength is the freedom of its citizens to speak out—to dissent from the popular view. Although the editors often disagree with the opinions expressed in Speaking Out, they dedicate the series to that freedom.

young people were brought to Berlin from all over the world, to be harangued (mostly about American atrocities). The estimated cost: $50 million.

6. The International Organization of Journalists was founded in Copenhagen in 1946 by a non-Communist majority. A year later the Communists took it over. By 1950 it was an active supporter of every Communist cause.

7. The World Federation of Trade Unions controlled the two most powerful labor unions in France and Italy and took its orders directly from Soviet Intelligence. Yet it was able to mask its Communist allegiance so successfully that the C.I.O. belonged to it for a time.

All in all, the CIA estimated, the Soviet Union was annually spending $250 million on its various fronts. They were worth every penny of it. Consider what they had accomplished.

First, they had stolen the great words. Years after I left the CIA, the late United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson told me how he had been outraged when delegates from underdeveloped countries, young men who had come to maturity during the cold war, assumed that anyone who was for "Peace" and "Freedom" and "Justice" must also be for Communism.

Second, by constant repetition of the twin promises of the Russian revolution—the promises of a classless society and of a transformed mankind—the fronts had thrown a peculiar spell over some of the world's intellectuals, artists, writers, scientists, many of whom behaved like disciplined party-liners.

Third, millions of people who would not consciously have supported the interests of the Soviet Union had joined organizations devoted ostensibly to good causes, but secretly owned and operated by and for the Kremlin.

How odd, I thought to myself as I watched these developments, that Communists, who are afraid to join anything but the Communist Party, should gain mass allies through organizational war while we Americans, who join everything, were sitting here tongue-tied.

And so it came about that I had a chat with Allen Dulles. It was late in the day and his secretary had gone. I told him I thought the CIA ought to take on the Russians by penetrating a battery of international fronts. I told him I thought it should be a worldwide operation with a single headquarters.

"You know," he said, leaning back in his chair and lighting his pipe, "I think you may have something there. There's no doubt in my mind that we're losing the cold war. Why don't you take it up down below?"

It was nearly three months later that I came to his office again—this time to resign. On the morning of that day there had been a meeting for which my assistants and I had prepared ourselves carefully. We had been studying Russian front movements, and working out a counteroffensive. We knew that the men who ran CIA's area divisions were jealous of their power. But we thought we had logic on our side. And surely logic would appeal to Frank Wisner.

Frank Wisner, in my view, was an authentic American hero. A war hero. A cold-war hero. He died by his own hand in 1965. But he had been crushed long before by the dangerous detail connected with cold-war operations. At this point in my story, however, he was still gay, almost boyishly charming, cool yet coiled, a low hurdler from Mississippi constrained by a vest.

He had one of those purposefully obscure CIA titles: Director of Policy Coordination. But everyone knew that he had run CIA since the death of the wartime OSS, run it through a succession of rabbit warrens hidden in the bureaucracy of the State Department, run it when nobody but Frank Wisner cared whether the country had an intelligence service. Now that it was clear that Bedell Smith and Allen Dulles were really going to take over, Frank Wisner still ran it while they tried to learn what it was they were supposed to run.

And so, as we prepared for the meeting, it was decided that I should pitch my argument to Wisner. He knew more than the others. He could overrule them.

The others sat in front of me in straight-backed chairs, wearing the troubled looks of responsibility. I began by assuring them that I proposed to do nothing in any area without the approval of the chief of that area. I thought, when I finished, that I had made a good case. Wisner gestured at the Chief, Western Europe. "Frank," came the response, "this is just another one of those goddamned proposals for getting into everybody's hair."

One by one the others agreed. Only Richard G. Stilwell, the Chief, Far East, a hard-driving soldier in civilian clothes who now commands U.S. forces in Thailand, said he had no objection. We all waited to hear what Wisner would say.

Incredibly, he put his hands out, palms down. "Well," he said, looking at me, "you heard the verdict."

Just as incredibly, he smiled.

Sadly I walked down the long hall, and sadly reported to my staff that the day was lost. Then I went to Mr. Dulles's office and resigned. "Oh," said Mr. Dulles, blandly. "Frank and I had talked about his decision. I overruled him." He looked up at me from over his papers. "He asked me to."

Thus was the International Organization Division of CIA born, and thus began the first centralized effort to combat Communist fronts.

Perhaps "combat" does not describe the relative strengths brought to battle. For we started with nothing but the truth. Yet within three years we had made solid accomplishments. Few of them would have been possible without undercover methods.

I remember the enormous joy I got when the Boston Symphony Orchestra won more acclaim for the U.S. in Paris than John Foster Dulles or Dwight D. Eisenhower could have bought with a hundred speeches. And then there was *Encounter*, the magazine published in England and dedicated to the proposition that cultural achievement and political freedom were interdependent. Money for both the orchestra's tour and the magazine's publication came from the CIA, and few outside the CIA knew about it. We had placed one agent in a Europe-based organization of intellectuals called the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Another agent became an editor of *Encounter*. The agents could not only propose anti-Communist programs to the official leaders of the organizations but they could also suggest ways and means to solve the inevitable budgetary problems. Why not see if the needed money could be obtained from "American foundations"?

As the agents knew, the CIA-financed foundations were quite generous when it came to the national interest.

I remember with great pleasure the day an agent came in with the news that four national student organizations had broken away from the Communist International Union of Students and joined our student outfit instead. I remember how Eleanor Roosevelt, glad to help our new International Committee of Women, answered point for point the charges about germ warfare that the Communist women's organization had put forward. I remember the organization of seamen's unions in India and in the Baltic ports.

There were, of course, difficulties, sometimes unexpected. One was the World Assembly of Youth.

We were casting about for something to compete with the Soviet Union in its hold over young people when we discovered this organization based in Dakar. It was dwindling in membership, and apparently not doing much.

After a careful assessment, we decided to put an agent into the assembly. It took a minimum of six months and often a year just to get a man into an organization. Thereafter, except for what advice and help we could lend, he was on his own. But, in this case, we couldn't give any help whatsoever The agent couldn't find anybody in the organization who wanted any.

The mystery was eventually solved by the man on the spot. WAY, as we had come to call it, was the creature of French intelligence—the *Deuxième Bureau*. Two French agents held key WAY posts. The French Communist Party seemed strong enough to win a general election. French intelligence was waiting to see what would happen.

We didn't wait. Within a year our man brought about the defeat of his two fellow officers in an election. After that, WAY took a pro-Western stand.

But our greatest difficulty was with labor. When I left the agency in 1954, we were still worrying about the problem. It was personified by Jay Lovestone, assistant to David Dubinsky in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

Once chief of the Communist Party in the United States, Lovestone had an enormous grasp of foreign-intelligence operations. In 1947 the Communist *Confédération Générale du Travail* led a strike in Paris which came very near to paralyzing the French economy. A takeover of the government was feared.

Into this crisis stepped Lovestone and his assistant, Irving Brown. With funds from Dubinsky's union, they organized *Force Ouvrière*, a non-Communist union. When they ran out of money, they appealed to the CIA. Thus began the secret subsidy of free trade unions which soon spread to Italy. Without that subsidy, postwar history might have gone very differently.

But though Lovestone wanted our money, he didn't want to tell us precisely how he spent it. We knew that non-Communist unions in France and Italy were holding their own. We knew that he was paying them nearly two million dollars annually. In his view, what more did we need to know?

We countered that the unions were not growing as rapidly as we wished and that many members were not paying dues. We wanted to be consulted as to how to correct these weaknesses.

I appealed to a high and responsible labor leader. He kept repeating, "Lovestone and his bunch do a good job."

And so they did. After that meeting, so did we. We cut the subsidy down, and with the money saved we set up new networks in other international labor organizations. Within two years the free labor movement, still holding its own in France and Italy, was going even better elsewhere.

Looking back now, it seems to me that the argument was largely a waste of time. The only argument that mattered was the one with the Communists for the loyalty of millions of workers. That argument, with the help of Lovestone and Brown, was effectively made.

By 1953 we were operating or influencing international organizations in every field where Communist fronts had previously seized ground, and in some where they had not even begun to operate. The money we spent was very little by Soviet standards. But that was reflected in the first rule of our operational plan: "Limit the money to amounts private organizations can credibly spend." The other rules were equally obvious: "Use legitimate, existing organizations; disguise the extent of American interest; protect the integrity of the organization by not requiring it to support every aspect of official American policy."

Such was the status of the organizational weapon when I left the CIA. No doubt it grew stronger later on, as those who took charge gained experience. Was it a good thing to forge such a weapon? In my opinion then—and now—it was essential.

Was it "immoral," "wrong," "disgraceful"? Only in the sense that war itself is immoral, wrong and disgraceful.

For the cold war was and is a war, fought with ideas instead of bombs. And our country has had a clear-cut choice: Either we win the war or lose it. This war is still going on, and I do not mean to imply that we have won it. But we have not lost it either.

It is now 12 years since Winston Churchill accurately defined the world as "divided intellectually and to a large extent geographically between the creeds of Communist discipline and individual freedom." I have heard it said that this definition is no longer accurate. I share the hope that John Kennedy's appeal to the Russians "to help us make the world safe for diversity" reflects the spirit of a new age.

But I am not banking on it, and neither, in my opinion, was the late President. The choice between innocence and power involves the most difficult of decisions. But when an adversary attacks with his weapons disguised as good works, to choose innocence is to choose defeat. So long as the Soviet Union attacks deviously we shall need weapons to fight back, and a government locked in a power struggle cannot acknowledge all the programs it must carry out to cope with its enemies. The weapons we need now cannot, alas, be the same ones that we first used in the 1950's. But the new weapons should be capable of the same affirmative response as the ones we forged 17 years ago, when it seemed that the Communists, unchecked, would win the alliance of most of the world.

Tom Braden