

Fresh Controversy Over an Old Subversive-Hunter

WASHINGTON — For a man who made a profession of searching out the political associations of others, Otto F. Otepka is remarkably reticent about his own.

After his nomination to the Subversive Activities Control Board last month brought him back into public focus, Mr. Otepka declined to discuss his activities over the past several years in connection with members of the John Birch Society.

It developed that he had been making speeches to right-wing gatherings, while a fund with Birch Society associations raised \$22,000 to defray most of the legal costs of his struggle for reinstatement as the State Department's chief security investigator. These, Mr. Otepka said, were his "private activities," and he would not talk about "the ideological orientation of anyone I am associated with."

His answers had an ironic ring to those who remembered that Mr. Otepka thrived as senior investigator for the late Scott McLeod, the State Department's right-wing chief of security from



Associated Press

CONTROVERSIAL: Former State Department security chief Otto Otepka, dismissed in 1963 for leaking confidential material to a Senate committee, was embroiled in controversy again last week as a result of his nomination to the Subversive Activities Control Board.

1953 to 1957, who vigorously weeded out "political undesirables."

The enthusiastic pursuit of "subversive elements" in government loosed by the late Senator Joseph McCarthy slowed to a desultory walk in later years, but Mr. Otepka, a stocky, polite-spoken man, did not change.

After the Kennedy Administration took office in 1961 he got into trouble for declining to dismiss an adverse security ruling against Walt W. Rostow, who became one of the strongest hawks in the Vietnam aviary. Mr. Otepka was dismissed in 1963 for passing classified documents without authorization to the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

At that point the name Otepka became a household word to that minority of Americans who go to bed each night fearful they will awake in the morning to find that subversives have

taken over the Federal Government.

The State Department made matters worse by what is now generally conceded as shabby handling of the case. Two officials resigned after first denying and then conceding in testimony to the Internal Security Subcommittee that they had bugged Mr. Otepka's telephone.

After about four years of interminable hearings appealing his dismissal, Mr. Otepka was formally reprimanded by Secretary of State Dean Rusk in December, 1967, and demoted to a paper-shifting job he described as "demeaning." It also paid him \$5,000 less than the \$20,585 he had drawn as chief security investigator and Mr. Otepka subsequently took leave of absence without pay, his current status.

When President Nixon promised a "full and exhaustive review" of Mr. Otepka's case during the election campaign last fall, the ultra-right was encouraged, only to be outraged after the new Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, upheld the ultimate finding of his predecessor, Mr. Rusk.

Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen, who has a number of vocal and wealthy ultra-conservative supporters in Illinois, discovered the balm. He suggested that Mr. Otepka be nominated to the Subversive Activities Control Board, a somewhat moribund institution the Senator has been working to resuscitate.

President Nixon submitted the nomination, but then Mr. Otepka's Birch Society associations became public through a New York Times article.

Senator Dirksen thought the matter important enough to leave a budget briefing at the White House last Tuesday to testify for Mr. Otepka before a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee. He accused The Times of trying to "smear" Mr. Otepka, and cited the presence of Dean Clarence Manion at a Boston rally Mr. Otepka attended last summer as evidence the rally was wrongly described as having Birch Society associations. Mr. Manion, former dean of Notre Dame Law School, said in a telephone conversation he is a

member of the Birch national council and has been for a number of years.

Mr. Otepka spent about three minutes in the witness chair. He was asked no questions and was praised as a patriot by the three members of the subcommittee, Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, the chairman; Senator John McClellan of Ar-

kansas and Senator Roman Hruska of Nebraska, all of whom seemed to share Senator Dirksen's sentiments.

No witnesses appeared to testify against Mr. Otepka, and with the liberals on the Judiciary Committee, like Senator

Edward M. Kennedy and Senator Phillip Hart of Michigan, busy with matters like hunger and the antiballistic missile debate, it appeared that Mr. Otepka's nomination might be confirmed.

—NEIL SHEEHAN