

*Charles B. Seib*

## Spies Under Media Cover

The American press treasures its freedom, and is quite willing to use its muscle when it perceives a threat to that freedom. A current example of such a reaction has been the massive media battle against the so-called Nebraska gag order, which is now before the Supreme Court.

Yet the news business has been strangely undisturbed by a threat to the whole idea of a free press posed by some of its own in cahoots with the CIA. The attitude seems to be: If we pretend that this little internal scandal doesn't exist, maybe it will go away. But it keeps coming back.

Its latest manifestation was in a report of the Senate intelligence committee. The report, issued April 27, revealed that until

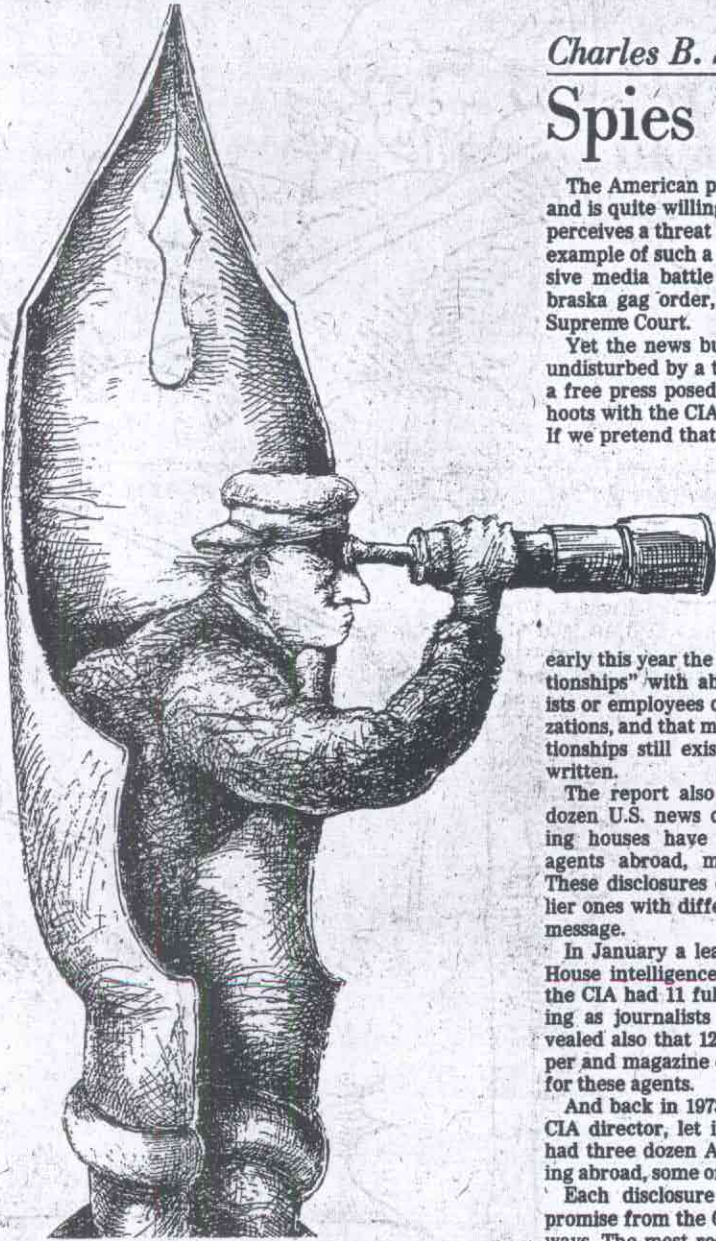
early this year the CIA had undercover "relationships" with about 50 American journalists or employees of American media organizations, and that more than half of those relationships still existed when the report was written.

The report also noted that more than a dozen U.S. news organizations and publishing houses have provided cover for CIA agents abroad, most of them knowingly. These disclosures came on the heels of earlier ones with different figures but the same message.

In January a leak from the report of the House intelligence committee revealed that the CIA had 11 full-time secret agents working as journalists overseas last year. It revealed also that 12 television, radio, newspaper and magazine companies provided cover for these agents.

And back in 1973, William Colby, then the CIA director, let it be known that the CIA had three dozen American journalists working abroad, some of them as fulltime agents.

Each disclosure has brought an almost-promise from the CIA that it would mend its ways. The most recent one came last Febru-



By Geoffrey Moss for The Washington Post

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ary from the present CIA director, George Bush. He said his agency would not "enter into any paid or contractual relationship with any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited by any United States news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station."

That seems fairly definite, although there may be some sleepers in it—that word "accredited," perhaps.

The Senate committee, which noted that it received only limited information and no names on the CIA's use of the media, says that covert use of staff members of general circulation U.S. news organizations "appears

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to be virtually phased out." But, assuming that appearances can be trusted, there is plenty of room for relationships with freelancers and stringers and with staffers of other than general circulation organizations.

In the face of the disclosures, the press has shown little of the investigative zeal so in fashion these days. After the leak from the House report, there was an effort to shake the names loose, but the CIA stonewalled and the effort soon died. And the cloud of suspicion continued to hover over the heads of all American journalists overseas.

I have seen just one specific result of the Senate report: The executive board of the National Conference of Editorial Writers passed a resolution opposing the clandestine CIA employment of any journalists, American or foreign, and noting the polluting effect of CIA material planted in the media anywhere in the world.

It also called on the CIA to release the names of American journalists employed by it now or in the past.

So what should be done? The editorial writers are right. The names of the journalists and the news organizations that have engaged in covert operations with and for the

CIA should be disclosed. I am referring to the journalists who have accepted payment from the agency and the organizations that have permitted CIA operatives to use them for cover or who have permitted their own people to work for the agency.

It should be noted that many journalists have contact with the CIA, as they do with all the other agencies of government. These contacts, and even the occasional trading of information such as constantly goes on between reporters and sources, are not what we're talking about here. We are talking about the deliberate subversion of the news business for the CIA's espionage and propaganda purposes.

Publication of names would solve part of the problem, but not all of it. The CIA apparently views the use of foreign media for propaganda and other purposes as a proper agency function. But this corruption of the foreign press has a fallout effect in this country. Inevitably some of the material CIA plants overseas trickles back to Americans in the form of wire service dispatches, special articles, reprints from foreign publications and the like.

So in addition to publicizing the names of American journalists and news organizations involved covertly with CIA, consideration should be given to ending the agency's use of foreign media as well. A presidential order would do the trick.

Even without the fallout problem, we should reject the idea that all will be well if the taint of CIA can be removed from American journalism.

The concept of a free press is not the special property of Americans. In the perfect world that lies too far beyond the horizon, all people will enjoy its benefits.

That millenium is a long, long way off. But is it right for an agency of the American government, of all governments, to work against it by subverting the foreign press? And is it right for the American news business to fail to oppose such activities tooth and nail? To ask such questions is to answer them.