

---

RICHARD COHEN

---

## *CIA Security Problem Is Focus of Bad U.S. Bill*

**A** COLLEAGUE OF MINE once wrote a story about a planned meeting of the Ku Klux Klan. Being a good reporter, he drove past the meeting place himself, noted the address and then wrote a story, giving the location and the proposed time of the meeting. Someone then blasted the place with a shotgun.

That is not much different from what has happened on a couple of occasions to the CIA. A fellow named Louis Wolf, editor of the Covert Action Information Bulletin, has printed the names and addresses of CIA agents in Jamaica and almost before the ink was dry, the home of one agent was shot up there.

The parallel between what my colleague and what Wolf did has nothing to do with any comparison of the CIA to the Klan or even, God forbid, vice versa. It has to do, instead, with how neither one of them intended violence to be the result of what they were doing. Instead, both of them wanted, for reasons of their own, to compile and print information—one for a story, the other for political purposes.

Journalists run into these situations from time to time. It's tragic when this happens, but it's also unpredictable and sometimes unavoidable, and Congress has not yet seen fit to frame a law that would forbid journalists from writing a story that might endanger someone's life. Such a law would be, among other things, unconstitutional.

But Congress has no such compunction when it comes to the CIA. It is now, for instance, considering a law that would make it illegal for anyone to disclose the names of CIA operatives even if the information comes from public documents. The same restrictions would apply to FBI counter-intelligence and counter-terrorist informers.

The bill has two purposes. It is designed to stop former intelligence agents like Phillip Agee from leaving the service and then ratting on their erstwhile colleagues. Nothing wrong with that.

But it is also designed to stop people like Wolf, or any journalist for that matter, from disclosing the name of a secret operative "with the intent to impair or impede the foreign intelligence activities of the United States."

It's hard for me, for one, to defend what Wolf is doing. He says his problem with the CIA is not its intelligence-gathering operation, but its covert operations. He did what he did in Jamaica, he said, when it became apparent to him that the CIA was trying to destabilize the government of Prime Minister Michael Manley and he named names because the only way you can stop the CIA is by stopping

See COHEN, B4, Col. 2

## ***CIA Security Problem Is Focus of Bad U.S. Bill***

COHEN, From B1

its agents—holding them personally accountable for what they do.

So his objection is essentially political. It is therefore a form of dissent and while to many people it might be objectionable or silly, he has a right to say what he wants to say as long as he breaks no law in the process.

On that score, he seems to be clean. No one, not even his most vehement critics, has accused Wolf of getting his information illegally or even unethically. He get no CIA agent drunk, sleeps with no secretaries, and breaks into no safes. All he does is read the public record. It could be done by others, too—foreign governments, for instance.

The thing for the CIA to do is clamp down, make sure that the information that now finds its way into the public record and, from there, to Wolf, stays within the agency. Instead, it has run to Congress and it, in turn, has given the agency the sort of bill that gives you, if you have even a passing admiration for the First Amendment, the willies. Think for a moment of the kind of mind reading it takes to figure out if a journalist intended to "impair or impede" the CIA.

Still, you might think that when it comes to the CIA and the wonderful work it does, that a little loss of freedom would be worth it. The problem is that this is the same CIA that went off half-cocked a little while back, got itself confused with the FBI, had an identity crisis in which it saw its aims as synonymous with God and Country, bugged Americans, spied on them, opened their mail, trafficked in character assassination and was used by Richard Nixon as a substitute for truth when he got inot trouble on Watergate. To "impair or impede" that CIA is a patriotic obligation.

Now, if I may, I would like to return to my colleague and the story he wrote about the Klan. It turned out that the shots were fired at the meeting place some 15 minutes before the paper hit the streets. The story could not possibly have caused what happened.

Wolf makes somewhat the same claim for himself. He dosen't think he is responsible for the Jamaica shooting.

Maybe, maybe not. It's hard to tell. But what's not hard to tell is that if this law is passed, it will stay on the books long after Louis Wolf is gone and the reason for its enactment has been forgotten. All that will remain is a bad law and yet another example of the CIA botching matters. It shot at Louis Wolf and hit the First Amendment instead.