

Kiss of Death

Q M 2/11/67
The National Student Association is reportedly giving consideration to folding its whole organization because it has been fatally compromised by the disclosure that it has been the recipient of secret subsidies from the Central Intelligence Agency. The leaders of the student group will be wise to terminate its existence. It is not likely to recover enough credibility at home or abroad to make its activities at all worth while.

The covert, concealed, dishonest support of the Government is the kiss of death for any group holding itself out as a private, independent, nongovernmental agency. Other organizations which have similarly accepted undisclosed governmental support will be well advised to quietly fold tents and give up the field. Even the open financial support by Government of nongovernmental academic and professional groups is sometimes compromising; but secret financial support is invariably so. The very resort to secrecy cries out against the integrity of the recipient. Every such subsidy indicts both giver and receiver. The Government agency, on its part, is tacitly acknowledging that disclosure would be fatal to its purposes. The whole transaction, from beginning to end, is touched with fraud and evasion. The very fact of secrecy transforms even what might be a legitimate cooperation into what obviously is an inadmissible conspiracy. And those who are caught in such a conspiracy cannot hope to regain credibility.

The Central Intelligence Agency, whatever good it has been doing, has been, at the same time, busily engaged in diminishing the credibility of all nongovernmental associations and organizations. This is a profound and serious national loss that it will be difficult to repair. We can only begin to repair it if the Government promptly and plainly puts an end to all such secret subventions and if private establishments join in binding themselves to a policy under which they are committed to refuse any secret Federal subsidies.