

"In the absence of any real information, I prefer to assume the best. The reason the CIA wants its own people inside the network news departments is to find out what is going on in the world."

Network TV and the CIA

By Marvin Kitman

NEW YORK—"I hope so," a top network news executive explained, when I asked him if he had any CIA agents on his staff. "It's a sign that you have a proper news organization. We'd lose face in the business if CIA felt we weren't worth infiltrating."

It seems that a lot of TV viewers were shocked by the recent revelation that CIA twice tried to hire Sam Jaffe while he served as a correspondent for CBS News and later as Moscow bureau chief for ABC News. If CIA had been successful, the fear is he may have been in a position to fool the public, which is under the impression that TV foreign correspondents are never influenced by our government.

Jaffe explained—on Steve Scheuer's "All About TV," a syndicated public television show—that he turned CIA down flat both times. I think he made a mistake.

It's a lot steadier working for CIA than the TV networks. (Jaffe's had three or four jobs since the agency first tried to recruit him.) And it pays well.

CIA has a bad reputation in some circles. But we should remember that our taxes support the organization. Its editorial point of view isn't very much different from the networks'. They're all solidly anti-Communist.

For anybody with a taste of adventure—the reason

Television

men become foreign correspondents—being a CIA agent is certainly more exciting than being an FBI agent. Overthrowing some left-wing government is a more socially useful activity than spying on hippie college kids.

Before getting upset about the attempt to recruit Jaffe, I would suggest viewers try to find out what CIA wanted him to do at the networks. Unfortunately, the publicity department at CIA isn't much help in answering questions like this. "As a matter of policy," the agency PIO always explains, "CIA does not confirm the accuracy of, nor dispute the inaccuracy of, what may be said about the agency."

This plays into the hands of TV viewers who automatically assume that CIA wanted Jaffe to mangle the news, twist the bad into the good or give the public the CIA line about sensitive issues. The swine!

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CIA has seen examples of the work of network foreign correspondents on the news shows. While they only see 90 seconds or so, CIA executives have an inkling the reporting is sounder than

their own private news sources. The networks always seem to be a step ahead of CIA's highly paid informers.

Perhaps it would have been wiser for CIA to set up its own ABC and CBS affiliates in Kansas or Wisconsin—with the call letters KCIA or WCIA—and be fed all the network news shows and out-takes. But they decided it would be cheaper to buy one of the network news employees, thus tapping the news-gathering apparatus. It's no more shocking a thing than planting somebody in the morgue of the New York Times so the agency can have access to that paper's terrific files.

What disturbs students of CIA like Hughes Rudd, the CBS correspondent who has received numerous offers, is the agency's style. "They got it into their heads that I spoke fluent Flemish," Rudd explained. "They persisted in that for five years.

"Every time they offered me a job they spoke Flemish. It's hard for me to even understand French. 'This language is gibberish,' I'd tell them. 'Come on, Rudd,' they'd say. 'We know you speak Flemish.' I finally had to tell them they weren't offering enough money. They understood that. Boy, it was spooky."

To this day, Rudd told me, he still runs into CIA agents at the press bars. "They turn their backs on me. It shows you how smooth they are."