

Cold War Backwash *Part 4*

Michigan State University has issued an institutional denial that it knowingly permitted its technical assistance projects in Vietnam to be used as a cover for CIA operations. University officials have had widely differing stories to tell in separate interviews however; and without quibbling over how it all got started, it appears likely that the CIA did, in any case, make use of the MSU facade. It also appears clear that this situation prevailed from the time MSU entered the aid field in Saigon in 1956 until sometime in 1959. Troubled University officials who tried to find a graceful way to end the CIA tie found it a rather complicated thing to come in from the cold.

It is easy to be cynical about an affair of this sort and to chalk it up as just another one of the inescapably sordid by-products of our cold war struggle against an unprincipled adversary. But however one may rationalize many aspects of our cloak-and-dagger operations abroad, it is dangerous to prostitute the integrity of an independent academic institution. People-to-people understanding depends on a free exchange of inquiring scholars, and such interchange obviously becomes impossible if the bonafides of American academicians can be called into question.