

Post 17776
Richard Welch and the CIA

It seems to me that CIA director Colby and other current and retired CIA employees are using a red herring to cover the agency's own guilt when they imply that the organization, Fifth Estate, which identified Richard Welch as a CIA agent in its publication, "Counterspy," is responsible for Welch's assassination in Greece. If CIA knew that Fifth Estate had blown Welch's cover, as it obviously did know, then it also knew that his continued

use in overseas assignments would be very risky. Why then, after Welch's identity was compromised, did the agency persist in risking his security? Was it trying to prove that it would not be moved into pulling its valued operatives out of covert service into safer assignments whenever Fifth Estate exposed them? If so, this would seem to be a particularly lethal form of bravado. Or, on the other hand, is the agency's system of career development for its staff so limited that it is unable to come up with trained replacements when compromised under cover agents must be shifted suddenly from their posts?

Finally, however, if The Post's assertion that "The CIA station chief's residence is well known in Athens" is true, then Welch's identity as an agent could hardly have been thought by the agency to be a secret which Fifth Estate revealed. And if Fifth Estate revealed only an obvious fact, then the noise about it being stirred up by the agency and its friends appears to be little more than a smokescreen designed to cover the agency's embarrassment over loss of a principal agent and to discredit Fifth Estate in the eyes of the American public.

In any event, since the agency has chosen to point the finger of guilt, rather than to remain characteristically silent, it would seem only fair that it also explain its own role in this matter a little more clearly.

JAMES E. HERBY

Vienna