

MEDIA

BETWEEN THE LINES

How the CIA Manages the Media

BY PETER BISKIND

For those of you who always suspected that the CIA had more than a passing interest in the American media, it will come as no surprise that you've been right all along. In the past few months, stories in *Penthouse*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times* have disclosed that when a CIA director reads the morning paper over breakfast, he's often reading "news" that his own agents may have written, planted, or otherwise influenced. Moreover, the recent disclosures have indicated that the CIA did not have to resort to cloak-and-dagger tactics to penetrate American news organizations. Publishers and high level management not only welcomed CIA overtures but often volunteered their services. "Let's not pick on some poor reporters," Carl Bernstein quoted former CIA director William Colby in *Rolling Stone*. "Let's go to the managements. They were witting."

Last August, *Penthouse* reporters Joe Trento and Dave Roman revealed that the Copley News Service (CNS), owned by the Copley Press, Inc., publishers of the *San Diego Union* and eight other papers, employed 23 people with CIA connections—all at the same time. CNS became the "eyes and ears" of the CIA in Latin America.

The Copley chain allegedly provided press credentials for CIA agents, furnished information to the CIA, published Agency-inspired editorials, and fed Agency-planted stories to CNS clients.

The romance between Copley and the CIA was mutually rewarding. In 1961, for example, when the *San Diego Union* discovered that the CIA was training Cuban exiles for the Bay of Pigs Invasion, it not only kept that news to itself but also published stories discounting rumors of a possible invasion of Cuba. In exchange, according to *Penthouse*, the CIA told Copley reporter Charles Keely that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. Keely broke the story and won the Raymond Clapper Memorial Award for his scoop.

Copley had a similar relationship with the FBI. Reporters' notes and photographs of anti-war demonstrations in San Diego in the 60s routinely went to FBI headquarters.

Two months after the *Penthouse* expose, Carl Bernstein attempted to sketch the full extent of CIA press-related operations in an article in *Rolling Stone*. According to Bernstein, more than 400 American journalists over the last 25 years "have secretly carried out assignments for the CIA." These assignments included everything from briefing CIA agents (who routinely met foreign correspondents returning from abroad at the boat) to planting "disinformation," fingering foreign nationals ripe for recruitment, or serving as messenger boys between the CIA and its spies in the field. The press provides particularly good

cover for intelligence operations, because its job is to snoop, and it can do so legitimately. "One journalist is worth 20 agents," said one CIA official quoted in *Rolling Stone*.

Bernstein also charged the Church Committee with suppressing evidence of the CIA's use of the media.

Contacts between the CIA and the media were often made at the highest level. "Among executives who lent their cooperation to the Agency," wrote Bernstein, "were William Paley of CBS, Henry Luce of *Time*, Inc., Arthur Hays Sulzberger of *The New York Times*, Barry Bingham, Sr., of the *Louisville Courier-*



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Journal, and James Copley of the Copley News Service." About 25 news organizations, including ABC, NBC AP, UPI, Hearst Newspapers, Scripps-Howard, *Newsweek*, the Mutual Broadcasting System, the *Miami Herald*, and the old *Saturday Evening Post* and *New York Herald Tribune*, flirted with the CIA, but CBS, *Time* magazine, and *The New York Times* established the most intimate, long term relationships with the Agency.

One source cited by Bernstein said that *The New York Times* "provided cover for about 10 CIA operatives between 1950 and 1966... under arrangements approved by the newspaper's late publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzberger." *Times* columnist C.L. Sulzberger, Arthur's nephew, was apparently regarded as an "asset" by the Agency right up until his recent retirement. "Young Cy... was very eager," a CIA official told Bernstein. "He loved to cooperate." C.L. Sulzberger once ran a CIA briefing paper almost verbatim under his byline in the *Times*. Sulzberger denies this, but the *Times* itself repeated the allegation in its own investigation of CIA-press cooperation.

CBS routinely supplied the CIA with newsfilm outtakes, gave it access to the CBS film library, provided cover for CIA employees, and allowed the Agency to monitor reports by its correspondents to the New York and Washington newsrooms.

Time-Life publisher Henry Luce was a good friend of the CIA's first director, Allen Dulles, as was *Newsweek* editor Malcolm Muir. Like Luce, Muir made a practice of briefing the CIA upon returning from trips abroad. "Whenever I heard something that I thought might be of interest to Allen Dulles, I'd call him up," said Muir.

Other journalists with close relations to the CIA include Seymour K. Friedin, formerly a *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent and now London Bureau chief for the Hearst papers, and Stewart Alsop, whose column appeared in the *Herald Tribune*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Newsweek*. One CIA source told Bernstein flat out that "Stew was a CIA agent." Stew's brother Joseph Alsop also moonlighted as a stringer for the CIA. He visited Laos in 1952 and the Philippines in 1953 at the Agency's request. "I'm proud they asked me, and I'm proud to have done it," said Alsop.

Hot on the heels of Bernstein's piece, former CIA intelligence analyst Frank Snepp disclosed that the Agency had disseminated false information to American newsmen during the closing days of

the Vietnam war. "The whole idea of a blood bath was conjured out of thin air. We had no intelligence to indicate that the South Vietnamese were facing a blood bath," Snepp said on television. Snepp named four reporters manipulated by the CIA: Keyes Beech of the *Chicago Daily News*, George McArthur of the *Los Angeles Times*, Wendell Merick of *U.S. News and World Report*, and Robert Shaplen of the *New Yorker*.

Snepp also alleged that the CIA had used Malcolm W. Browne of *The New York Times* to pass messages to the Communists, and had deliberately fed Browne false information.

The *Times*, doubtless stung by Snepps and Bernstein's charges, published its own lengthy report by John M. Crewdson,—based on a three month investigation by himself, Joseph B. Treaster, and a team of researchers.

Some sources familiar with the CIA's maneuvers have suggested that the *Times* piece is part of a CIA "damage limitation" effort, that is, an attempt by the Agency to control the direction of the disclosures by selectively leaking only certain kinds of information to the press. For example, the *Times* piece says that Bernstein's figures of 400 American journalists is vastly inflated and that only 40 to 100 journalists (out of thousands) over the past 25 years were involved with the CIA. The *Times* contradicts Bernstein's claim that contacts between the Agency and the media were made at a high level. Crewdson emphasizes the CIA's network of foreign assets, minimizes the importance of its use of Americans, and gives the impression that the CIA's operations in this area have been radically reduced.

Nevertheless, the *Times* does provide, for the first time, a picture of the CIA's world-wide propaganda apparatus, whimsically called "Wisner's Wurlitzer," after its maestro, Frank Wisner, the CIA's master of "black" operations. According to the *Times*, the CIA has, at various times, "owned or subsidized more than 50 newspapers, news services, radio stations, periodicals, and other communication entities," while another dozen foreign-based news organizations were penetrated by paid CIA agents.

The CIA has produced or subsidized at least 1000 books since the early 50s. At its peak, the CIA had 800 propaganda assets, consisting mostly of foreign journalists. "Asked in an interview last year whether the CIA had ever told such agents what to write," said the *Times*, Colby replied, "Oh, sure, all the time."

These agents performed a variety of services, which included doctoring Argentine newsreels, passing CIA money to Italian Christian Democrats, German Social Democrats, and Chilean rightists, and fabricating bogus stories—Russian nuclear tests that never happened, imaginary Chinese military aid to the Vietminh in their war against the French, and so on.

One striking disclosure concerns, once again, the *Times* itself. When the CIA was busy overthrowing the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954, it prevailed upon *Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger to steer the paper's reporter, Sidney Gruson, away from the story because the CIA feared he was too liberal and might report the truth.

What next? The *Times* account gives the impression that "Much of the Wurlitzer is now dismantled... A smaller network of foreign journalists remains, and some undercover CIA men may still roam the world, disguised as correspondents for obscure trade journals or business newsletters." But this is misleading. According to one reliable source, as of April 1976, the CIA still counted 200 newspapers and periodicals, 30 press services and news agencies, 20 radio and TV stations, and 25 book publishers as foreign assets. Not bad for a "dismantled" operation.

The CIA recently announced that it would in the future refrain from establishing contacts with part- or full-time journalists "accredited" by American news organizations. David Wise, former Washington Bureau chief of the *New York Herald Tribune* and author of two books critical of the CIA, *The Invisible Government* and *The American Police State*, was skeptical. "There's a loophole in that big enough to drive a truckload of journalists through. They don't include free-lancers, and, besides, what do they mean by accredited?" A journalist is usually accredited by an agency, like a city police department, that he or she covers, not by news organizations. This may be more CIA doubletalk.

"There are a number of reporters still active who worked for the CIA, and I'm sure many are still doing it," said Wise. "They didn't all retire to Vermont."

CIA watchers are convinced that the recent revelations, although detailed, are just the tip of the iceberg. "This is the first level of exposure," said John Marks, of the Center for National Security Studies. "The CIA is like concentric circles. You penetrate one, and there are six more to go. We've got to keep at it." □