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## CIA Taint on the Press

There's no point in beating a dead horse. But I want to take just one more swing at the one that daily becomes more aromatic out behind CIA headquarters.

I'm talking about the CIA's involvement with the press—this country's and the world's. The superspies persist in their refusal to provide details of this relationship, past or present. And the press, for all its investigative zeal, just can't seem to get interested in doing anything about it.

Two developments prompt me to return to this unpopular subject. The first is the recent Soviet charge that three leading American correspondents in Moscow work for the CIA. The second is correspondence between CIA director George Bush and several journalistic organizations.

To set the stage, the CIA's stated position on its use of the media is that, as of last Feb. 11, it has sworn off "paid or contractual relationships with any full-time or part-time correspondent accredited by any U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station."

The agency insists that its past relationships with journalists involved no impropriety or any intention to influence or harm the American press. It also says it has no intention of revealing, now or later, the names of journalists who have worked for it.

What does all this mean in concrete terms? Just what does CIA mean by "accredited," for example? The Senate Intelligence Committee recently reported that until early this year the CIA had undercover "relationships" with about 50 American journalists, and that more than half these ties were continuing despite the Feb. 11 statement. The Senate report also said that staff investigators found that two employees of "general circulation U.S. news organizations" were still functioning as paid undercover CIA contacts.

And that brings us to the Russian charges. Literaturnaya Gazeta, the publication of the Union of Soviet Writers, asserted late last month that Christopher S. Wren of The New York Times, George Krimsky of the Associated Press and Alfred Friendly Jr. of Newsweek were associated with the CIA.

There is no reason to believe the charges. No hard evidence was produced, and there have been strong denials from the men, highly regarded journalists, and their publications.

But is it not reasonable to believe

that the CIA's unwillingness to cut its ties to American journalism feeds the suspicions that lead to such charges? Does not that same unwillingness make it more difficult to refute the charges?

A number of journalists and journalistic organizations have called for the publication of the names of news people who have been in the pay of, the CIA, and of news organizations that have knowingly provided CIA cover.

That, it is argued, is the only way the American press can be cleansed of the taint of spy work. Also, to be pragmatic, such publication would be quite effective in discouraging future CIA-press relationships. But, as it noted in its Feb.

11 policy statement, the CIA has no intention of doing that. Which brings us to the Bush letters.

On May 3, the National News Council, a press-monitoring body, wrote to Bush expressing deep concern about reports of CIA-press ties and asking for more information on the ties and the portent they hold for a free press in a free society. The council noted that it was not asking for publication of names of indi-

viduals employed by CIA.

In reply, Bush said that he had hoped the Feb. 11 statement "would relieve the minds of those in the field of journalism." He said that "it has reassured many with whom I have spoken privately."

On May 14, directors of the Fund for Investigative Journalism, which underwrites journalistic projects, wrote a much stronger letter than the News Council's. It said the clandestine use of American news people by the CIA is "destructive of the fundamental premises of a free press and corrosive of the First Amendment."

The Fund's board urged that the CIA go beyond its earlier statement and announce termination of the use of all journalists, including freelancers, stringers and part-time reporters and editors, whether or not accredited.

That brought a reply in which Bush said he had "talked privately to a number of members of the Fourth Estate. Although not all of them are totally happy with the situation as it is, I have met with considerable quiet understanding. One top figure in the national media told me privately that he thought that after issuance of my statement, no more could properly be demanded of us."

Bush went on to say that "in a perfect world, we might be able to run the intelligence business in response to the criticisms of each and every point of view, but I'm afraid that perfect world is not yet here."

Bush is right about the imperfection of the world. But questions must be raised about his claims of support for his position within the news business. Who are those members of the Fourth Estate who have privately given Bush their "quiet understanding," whatever that is? Who is the top figure in the national media who said he was satisfied with the CIA position?

What we are faced with now is not only the knowledge that the CIA has been and continues to be the employer of an undisclosed number of unnamed American journalists, but that its stonewalling has the support, or at least the acquiescence, of a number of media people—at the top level, we must assume. But they, too, are unnamed. Could there be a Catch-22 here by which some of those who have shown "quiet understanding" also have or have had an involvement, direct or indirect, with the agency?

We don't know. What we do know is that the taint of CIA involvement continues to pollute the American press as a whole. We also know that because of the taint, charges such as those leveled by the Soviet magazine are bound to find a more accepting audience.