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Ex-agents surface to defend CIA: a coincidence?

By Saul Friedman
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WASHINGTON — Twenty years ago, David Atlee Phillips, who had published a newspaper in Chile, was out on the lecture circuit talking about Latin American politics and the Communist threat.

Under the cover of lecturer, however, he actually was a staff officer of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Now Phillips is a leader among a growing number of former spies who are popping in from the cold or out from behind keyholes to defend the CIA.

There is no evidence that the CIA is behind the recent rash of statements, but there are signs of organization and coordination among the ex-employees. And their position in defense of the agency parallels, in part, that taken by CIA Director William Colby.

Last month in Miami, Mike Ackerman, a 34-year-old former case officer in the agency's Clandestine Services, came forward to tell the Miami Herald

that the CIA was "paralyzed" because of the current attacks on it.

Ackerman, a Latin American specialist, had worked for Phillips, who described him "as one of the youngest and brightest intelligence officers, a

top-notch man who I've known for many years." Like Phillips, Ackerman says he quit the CIA last spring, partly because he wished to defend the agency.

Last week, Robert Cunningham, a businessman and publisher from Georgetown, S.C., who in the 60s helped run the Rome Daily American in partnership with the CIA, went public to tell the Charlotte Observer: "I'm trying to educate the American public to what it's all about."

Elsewhere, former high ranking officials like Ray Cline, who ran the State Department's Intelligence Bureau; James Angleton, former CIA chief of Counter Intelligence; retired Col. Fletcher Prouty, former Pentagon liaison officer with the CIA, and Harry Rositzke, a top assistant in the CIA Counter Intelligence staff, have been talking to the press, appearing on television talk shows, writing articles

and debating the agency's critics.

Phillips, working out of his home, formed the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers to tell the CIA story.

Said Phillips: "Public concern over the rash of sensationalism and exposes involving U.S. intelligence has generated suggestions for corraling the CIA . . . (but) the U.S. in today's world cannot afford any less than the assurance of a first-class intelligence capability . . . nor should the U.S. be deprived of the ability to apply covert political action . . ."

The spectacle of ex-employees still loyal to the CIA shedding their prized anonymity is a reaction to those other former agents who, in books or as unnamed sources for the reporters, have blown the whistle on some of the CIA's seamier ventures.

The two biggest breaks in the secrecy of the CIA were the books, "The Out of Intelligence" by John Marks and former agent Victor Marchetti, and the even more explosive "Inside the Company" by long-time agent Philip Agee, who named many agents and agency organizations.