

CIA vs. Reds By Chalmers M. Roberts

Agency Mounts Counterdrive

THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency appears at the moment to be engaged in something of a counter-offensive, a role it essays only rarely.

The target in general is the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, specifically Moscow's "Disinformation Department" in its state security service.

But, as in the past, there is an inevitable spillover in which the target also is the American press; specifically those who write critical items about the CIA.

Last week a CIA paper on the Soviet and bloc "defamation campaign" surfaced at the Capitol. It repeated and added to well-documented charges aired at a congressional hearing in 1961 on Communist forgeries aimed at discrediting the United States.

THE BURDEN of the new paper was that the Communists are concentrating on discrediting the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, certainly an old truth and here documented. Implicitly, if not explicitly, the American press is given a share of the blame.

"Western source material, often taken out of context," is used by the Communists, the report says. Soviet secret services have "deep interest" in "the development and 'milking' of Western journalists. Americans figure prominently among these," it adds.

An "opportunity" to attack the CIA, cited by the CIA report, was "The Invisible Government," a 1964 best seller by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, Washington newsmen.

This book was also referred to in a State Department briefing for visiting editors on Tuesday. An anonymous (under the rules) spokesman commented that many things in the book just were not so.

This official added that it was no accident that the

book is something of a best seller in the Communist world and has been given wide distribution in Africa.

COMMENTS of an adverse nature have been heard, too, about newspaper articles published in the wake of the recently disclosed CIA case in Singapore—articles detailing past cases.

The argument made in rebuttal is that the two central charges against the agency, irresponsibility and incompetence, are just not true. As former CIA Director Allen Dulles wrote in "The Craft of Intelligence," it is said that the agency "has never carried out any action of a political nature, given any support of any nature to any persons, potentates or movements, political or otherwise, without appropriate approval at a high political level in our Government outside the CIA."

Current practice is for a Cabinet level committee to approve every sizable activity. A nongovernment group also has a hand in criticism and control, by presidential order.

Incompetence, too, is denied although a sometime lack of professionalism is conceded and a tendency to make CIA too much of a career service is admitted. However, the CIA has never quite abandoned the idea that the Bay of Pigs might not have been such a debacle if President Kennedy had not altered the orders.

THE CIA denies it is an invisible government; it

wishes it could operate in total secrecy. Dulles is for freedom of the press but not for "complete license." He would prefer the British D-note system, a voluntary censorship plan to put the press under wraps. The American press has strongly resisted any such move just as the CIA resists every attempt to create a congressional watchdog committee to check the agency.

Maybe the current CIA counteroffensive is a passing phase. But as long as the agency has so much power and money, the press should not and cannot stop writing about it, despite known abilities and accomplishments of the agency.

The CIA is simply far too important an element in the U. S. Government to permit it the anonymity it would prefer.

On an NBC-TV program last May, Richard Bissell, former head of covert operations, suggested that "those who believe that the U. S. Government on occasion resorts to force where it shouldn't, should in all fairness and justice, direct their views to the question of national policy" rather than criticize the CIA as an "evil and ill-controlled agency."

Fair enough. But nobody in Washington is going to accept the idea that policy is made in a vacuum or that the CIA has no influence on policy formation.



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