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CIA Read Meany's Mail In '50s as Fund Check

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The Central Intelligence Agency secretly read the mail of AFL-CIO President George Meany and two senior international aides during the 1950s to monitor the flow of covert U.S. funds to anti-Communist trade unions in Europe.

A high-ranking former intelligence official who personally took part in the program said the mail cover operation was directed at Meany as well as at Jay Lovestone, the AFL-CIO's now retired director of international affairs, and Irving Brown, the AFL-CIO's European representative.

The former official, who requested that his name not be publicly divulged, said the mail cover operation was inaugurated because the CIA was not able to get sufficient financial reporting from the American unions that served

as conduits for agency funds to European trade unions.

The CIA declined to make any official comment either on the mail cover program or the suggestion that the agency funneled money through the American trade union movement to foreign unions.

The first public disclosure of CIA subsidizing of trade unions in Europe and Latin America was made in the aftermath of the disclosure by Ramparts magazine in 1966 of clandestine CIA funding of the National Student Association.

A number of American trade union leaders including the late Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers; Arnold Zander, former president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and Charles Perlik

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of The American Newspaper Guild confirmed subsequently that their unions served as CIA money conduits.

But Meany, Lovestone and Brown have denied the existence of financial relationships between the AFL-CIO and the CIA. So has the CIA.

The CIA became involved in the European labor movement shortly after World War II in collaboration with AFL and CIO officials. Communist unions and trade union confederations were the principal target of the program. The agency's interest later expanded to Latin America, where the AFL-CIO maintains a program known as the American Institute for Free Labor Development, and Africa.

Two official participants in the CIA's program to build up the anti-Communist trade union movement in Europe during the 1950s spoke of difficulties in getting adequate financial accounting from the unions.

"If you're running a bank and you have doubts about where the money is going," said one of the CIA alumni, "you try to find out. What the hell, this wasn't a question of civil liberties. Maybe you shouldn't read people's mail. But we had no other way of finding out."

The former intelligence official, who said he read some of the correspondence between Meany and his two subordinates during the mail monitoring program, said the agency satisfied itself that the general management of the funds was found to be satisfactory.

former director of the CIA's International Organizations Division, Thomas W. Braden, wrote in The Saturday Evening Post in 1967 that he funneled \$50,000 in \$50 bills to Victor Reuther through his brother, Walter.

Braden wrote in the 1967 article that the money was intended to influence labor unions in West Germany. Victor Reuther, wrote Braden, spent the money with "something less than perfect wisdom."

The CIA's coordination with the American trade unions abroad was supervised by the agency's International Organizations Division. Braden was succeeded as head of the unit by Cord Meyer Jr., now the

CIA's chief of station in London.

Meany, when questioned last Dec. 19 on the AFL-CIO's connections with the CIA on the Dick Cavett show, said:

"That's completely ridiculous. The CIA is set up, as I understand it, to get information for the executive branch of government. The CIA has nothing to do with our unions and we have nothing to do with the CIA."

The only personal contacts Meany acknowledged were separate lunches with former CIA directors Richard M. Helms and John McCone. He was unavailable for comment yesterday on the subject of the alleged postal surveillance of himself, Brown and Lovestone.

"We saw reports saying: 'I saw so-and-so yesterday and he is qualified for help.' There were some unpleasant surprises but on the whole no one was being robbed," the former CIA aide recalled. "Allen Dulles the late CIA director always used to say, 'you've got to give them the dough and leave them a certain amount of independence.'"

When the program of trade union cooperation with the CIA began in the post-World War II years, before the merger between the AFL and CIO, it was the AFL that initially entered into secret operational agreements with the agency. The CIO, it was understood, complained about the arrangement.

In 1953, however, Victor Reuther became the European representative of the CIO. A