

Charles McCabe

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Himself

'Killer Schorr'

RICHARD M. HELMS, who used to be a newspaperman himself, is usually described as "debonair" or "aristocratic" when his name gets in the papers. His name gets in the papers mostly because he is a former head of the CIA, and is in what you might call a bit of trouble.

Helms went before the Rockefeller Commission recently for 3½ hours to answer questions about charges the CIA had been involved in assassination attempts while he was its head. His answer was curious:

"As far as I know," he said, "the CIA was never responsible for the assassination of any foreign leader. That is my honest belief."



That's a funny answer to give as a former director of a spy agency. Why not a flat no? Or is Mr. Helms trying to tell us that there may have been guys in the CIA, when he was head of it, who went around bumping off foreign political figures, and just didn't tell him about it?

One of the people who heard the Helms' testimony with a certain amount of skepticism was CBS reporter Daniel Schorr. Schorr is probably the toughest nut among the tube journalists. He has been a thorn in the side of both the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

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IT WAS Schorr who first reported that President Ford was concerned that the CIA investigation would disclose that the spy agency had a role in the assassination of three foreign leaders. Helms has specifically accused Schorr of false reports of CIA involvement in foreign assassinations.

What was more interesting, and more disquieting, than Helms' testimony before the Rockefeller group was what he said when it was all over. As he walked down the hallway he bitterly denounced Schorr. In a loud voice he said, "Killer Schorr, Killer Schorr."

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw that report. "The guy's got to be crackers," I said to myself. Helms has been under a lot of pressure since he had his true cover blown as CIA head; but to shout "Killer" at a television newsman indicates an instability that one hopes did not affect Helms when he was heading the spy agency. He is now, by grace of Richard Nixon, ambassador to Iran.

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HELM'S outburst brings up irresistibly a question I have been reluctant to address myself to: Should we get rid of the CIA? The reason I've been reluctant has been partly because I no longer have any real knowledge of CIA operations, and partly because the only answer I can give, on the basis of my knowledge, is a Yes and No.

There is a lot of sophomoric junk in the workings of the CIA. There is the famous story about the CIA official who boasted to a newsman: "In a period of 18 months, the CIA accurately recorded six changes in the color of the hair of the mistress of a collective-farm official near Stalingrad." Note the word accurately.

Against this kind of mindless gossip-gathering, there is the truth that a lot of legitimate intelligence work is done by the agency in monitoring foreign publications and broadcasts — most estimates put this work at about 80 per cent of the agency's work load.

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THERE is no reason why the legitimate intelligence gathering of the CIA could not be transferred to the State Department. The dirty tricks should be eliminated if they cannot be sold to Congress, and permitted if they can be sold to Congress.

The trouble with the CIA, as one observer has pointed out, is that it is all dressed up with no place to go. We are not at war with anyone right now, or planning such war.

The CIA has made our foreign policy a laughing matter in too many places. Any outfit that would take E. Howard Hunt seriously enough to employ him in responsible positions for years has got to have something badly wrong with it.