

C.I.A. Ties to Journalists

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Wide Concern Is Voiced in Press Corps
Over House Panel Report on Infiltration

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 27—A draft copy of a report by the House Select Committee on Intelligence last week said that 11 full-time officers of the Central Intelligence Agency were posing as journalists overseas in connection with their intelligence work. The report said further that until 1973 five agents posed as full-time correspondents with organizations that have "major general news impact." Moreover, the report said, some 15 news organizations had cooperated with the C.I.A. in providing "cover" for C.I.A. operatives.

This is not the first time that C.I.A. infiltration of news organizations has been charged. But it is the most authoritative report on the subject yet and it has caused widespread suspicion in the national press corps.

However, the main concern here is that readers, viewers and listeners will begin to believe that their news is colored by the C.I.A.

William E. Colby, who steps down this week as Director of Central Intelligence, has reportedly said in private sessions of the committee that the C.I.A. never intended to manipulate the news flowing to Americans.

Mr. Colby has said on several occasions that the C.I.A. no longer has covert relationships with staff members of major general-service news organizations. This practice, he said, was ended in 1973. But he said that the C.I.A. still did not feel that there was anything wrong with hiring "stringers," or partime correspondents, who sell their information to news organizations in this country.

Cover Termed Main Aim

The agency, he and others contend, simply recognized that a journalist was a very good cover job for a spy. A journalist can travel about asking questions, even snapping photographs, and justify his activities by saying he is on a story. Moreover, in some countries a journalist often gains entree to the centers of power and decision making.

But using an American press card for cover, even if the intelligence officer is not going to write misleading articles for American readers, creates peculiar problems in the United States. Press freedom here is protected from Government intrusion under the First Amendment—a reader, viewer or listener has the right to expect that the news will not be slanted to conform to a governmental position

An agent reporting from abroad to the United States would face an impossible task in sorting out his allegiance to his real employer, the C.I.A., from that to his news organization and its readers.

Moreover, if American journalists are thought to be spies—incidentally, a commonly held view of Soviet newsmen—then they are bound to face greater distrust and, in some countries, greater danger than they would normally.

C.I.A. Bars Disclosure

Many senior intelligence officers at the C.I.A. acknowledge that infiltrating or manipulating organizations that distribute news here runs counter to the concept of a free press. But these officials and the C.I.A. have formally refused to make public the names of which American news agencies in the past, or currently, "cooperate" with the C.I.A., which ones allowed themselves to be used as a cover and the names of the newsmen who secretly worked for the C.I.A.

In November 1973, the Washington Star reported that about three dozen American journalists, including five full-time correspondents, were working abroad on the C.I.A.'s payroll. According to Mr. Colby, that article, which gave no names,

had resulted from a discussion he had had with the paper's editorial board in which he conceded that the agency had infiltrated news organizations.

C.I.A. officials have cited the same justification for this non-disclosure stand as they have over the last year in resisting Congressional subpoenas for other specific names and organizations.

They argue that to disclose the names of individuals would endanger their lives, hold them up to ridicule and censure if they are still in journalism and destroy them as sources of information if they are still active in intelligence.

The agency has refused to disclose the names of the news organizations on the ground that if these names were made public the individuals could be easily identified. In other words, the agency wants to remain silent on the subject.

It is resting its case on Mr. Colby's assertion that infiltration of news organizations based here or with impact here has stopped.

In this vacuum, however, suspicion is rapidly rising. On Capitol Hill, virtually every major news organization is rumored to have been a cover for the C.I.A.

Newsmen who have risen quickly to prominence, are conservative or were once C.I.A. employees are under suspicion. Newsmen who have served in certain foreign posts are suspect because they did, and others are suspect because they did not.

Last Friday, Sam Jaffe, a former television newsmen who admits he was an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said that Walter Cronkite of CBS, John Chancellor of NBC and William Sheehan, president of ABC News, were on a list of 20 to 200 journalists who were paid by the C.I.A.

Mr. Cronkite and Mr. Chancellor denied the charge and ABC issued a similar denial for Mr. Sheehan. Before the day was out, the C.I.A. had discounted the story and staff members of both Congressional committees investigating intelligence activities said they had no evidence there was such a list.

Senator Church's View

Senator Frank Church, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, told newsmen at a breakfast several weeks ago that he would release the names of news organizations that had been infiltrated, if they disseminated news to Americans.

But late last week, though he said his committee was pressing for the names and details, he said that he would favor releasing the details only "if we find that this was intended by the C.I.A. in order to influence American opinion within our own country."

Privately, members of the committee's staff are worried that the disclosure of names and organizations might harm a news agency unfairly, destroy or harm the career of a reporter unfairly and whether the news media really want to know who in their midst secretly compromised objectivity to provide cover for Government agencies.

There is no question that a broad disclosure about relations between news organizations and the C.I.A. may be painful for some. Already several well-known newsmen who served as intelligence officers before entering journalism have been hurt by suspicion.

But interviews with newsmen on all levels in Washington showed that most thought an authoritative disclosure would end the suspicion, permit the news organizations involved to make a statement on their future policy and remove suspicion from the hundreds of reporters and dozens of news organizations that have no questionable connection with the C.I.A.