

KENNEDY DEFENDS FINANCING BY C.I.A.

Says Basic Decision Was
Made by Executive Branch

By MARJORIE HUNTER

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 21 —

Senator Robert F. Kennedy said today it was unfair to let the Central Intelligence Agency "take the rap" for secretly financing private groups.

Basic decisions for the secret subsidies, he said, were made by "the executive branch in the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations."

Senator Kennedy's defense of the embattled agency came after sharp criticism of the C.I.A. by two high Administration officials — Vice President Humphrey and John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

The New York Democrat's comments were made in interviews with United Press International and The Associated Press and were later confirmed by his office.

The Senator made similar remarks at a luncheon with newsmen last week, but declined at the time to be quoted by name.

Agencies Approached

Senator Kennedy said today that "all relevant Government agencies" were approached for approval of the basic decision on C.I.A. subsidies.

"That includes the White House," he said. "If the policy was wrong, it was not the product of the C.I.A. but of each Administration."

While not passing on the merits of the policy, Senator Kennedy added:

"We must not forget that we are not dealing with a dream world, but with a very tough adversary."

The Senator was not available for further comment later to-

day on the level of White House involvement in formulating the subsidy policy.

However, his office said that the Senator had not meant to leave the impression that any of the three Presidents—Mr. Eisenhower, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson — had personally directed the policy.

"What the Senator said was that the decision was made at the highest levels of the executive branch, but he did not say how high," said Frank Mankiewicz, the Senator's press secretary.

Asked if Senator Kennedy, as Attorney General and close adviser to his brother, President Kennedy, had been aware of the C.I.A. subsidy policy, Mr. Mankiewicz said:

"The Senator knew the Government was financing some students at international conferences, and that this was probably with C.I.A. money."

The strongest Administration criticism of the C.I.A. link with private groups, including students and labor organizations, came yesterday in a speech by Vice President Humphrey at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif.

The C.I.A. infiltration into the National Student Association, Mr. Humphrey said, was "one of the saddest times our Government has had in terms of public policy."

Mr. Humphrey had known of the C.I.A. involvement with the student group at least since last July. At that time, a student leader had sought his help in obtaining private financing to replace the C.I.A. subsidies.

According to the most recent edition of Ramparts magazine, Mr. Humphrey sought help for the student group in letters to Roger M. Blough, board chairman of United States Steel Corporation; David Rockefeller, president of Chase Manhattan Bank, and Henry Ford 2d, board chairman of Ford Motor Company.

In his speech at Stanford, Mr. Humphrey said he had been asked to get private support for the student group, as an alternative to C.I.A. sponsorship, but had been turned down.

"Private resources haven't done the job," he said.