

Embattled Security Aide

Otto Fred Otepka

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The morning after Richard M. Nixon's election as President, Otto Fred Otepka was exuberant. When he strode into the State Department cafeteria, a friend flashed him the "V for victory" sign, and there was much merriment. Mr. Nixon was quoted during the campaign as having promised a "full and exhaustive review" into facts surrounding

Man in the News

Mr. Otepka's dismissal as the State Department's chief security evaluator.

Although the White House would not characterize Mr. Otepka's appointment today to a \$36,000-a-year post on the Subversive Activities Control Board as a vindication, his friends were obviously delighted. His lawyer called it "a magnificent end to a glorious fight."

The "fight" began in 1963, when Mr. Otepka was dismissed from his job for providing the Senate Judiciary Committee's Internal Security Subcommittee with confidential information.

The State Department contended the security official had violated a 1948 executive order prohibiting disclosure of Executive Department files without authorization.

Conservative Cause

Mr. Otepka's cause was taken up by a number of conservatives. He was opposed by important liberals who remembered him as the State Department's specialist at sifting into the background of others during the antisubversion campaigns of the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.

Mr. Otepka was born in Chicago on May 6, 1915. He worked as a clerk in the Farm Credit Administration and the Internal Revenue Service while attending law school here at what is now Catholic University.

After graduation in 1942, he entered the security field as a wartime investigator and security officer for the Civil Service Commission and continued the specialty as an enlisted man in the Navy during World War II. After the



Associated Press

His case was a cause for conservatives.

war, he returned to the Civil Service Commission.

In September, 1953, Mr. Otepka was recruited by the late Scott McLeod, one of the State Department's most zealous investigators during the McCarthy era, to be head of the department's security evaluation division.

Judged Reliability

During his 10 years at the State Department, he is said to have passed preliminary judgment on the security reliability of more persons than anyone else in Washington.

In 1967, after lengthy hearings, Mr. Otepka was formally reprimanded by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and was assigned to a job in the department's office of management and organization, a post he once described as "very demeaning, a clerical job really."

He said he did nothing on the job except read The Congressional Record, and in a full year on the job he reportedly received only two department phone calls. Since last April, he has been on administrative leave.

Mr. Otepka is married to the former Edith Sirkon. They have one daughter.

Editorial

Wrong Man, Wrong Agency

Asked about President Nixon's decision to nominate Otto F. Otepka to the Subversive Activities Control Board, the White House press secretary said, "I think the appointment speaks for itself."

It certainly does, with revolting eloquence. Only last month, Secretary of State Rogers refused to restore Mr. Otepka to the State Department post from which Dean Rusk had dismissed him for giving confidential loyalty-security files to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee without permission. Mr. Otepka's name recalls immediately some of the worst abuses of the Joseph R. McCarthy era—particularly the reckless use of raw security files.

So, with Secretary Rogers declining to reinstate Mr. Otepka at State, the President in effect proposes to give the man a \$15,000-a-year raise by naming him to a \$36,000 seat on a worthless Federal agency fathered by the late Senator Pat McCarran. The S.A.C.B. in fact would have expired in June of this year if the Johnson Administration had not made a cynical deal with Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen to keep it alive.

Is Mr. Nixon simply tossing a bone to a restive Republican right-wing? Or does the President intend to keep alive part of his past as a Communist chaser by resurrecting the S.A.C.B. as well as Otto Otepka? It is a bad joke to say that Mr. Otepka and the S.A.C.B. deserve one another; the result of appointing him will be mischievous or worse. The Senate should kill the nomination; and Congress should kill an agency that performs no function, useless or otherwise.