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# Don't Look Now...

By Anthony Lewis

There was a small story in the paper the other day about a Central Intelligence Agency operative out in Thailand faking a letter from the local guerrillas to the Thai Government. The agency apologized to the Thais for the incident, described it as an aberration and said it would never happen again.

A reassuring story, that. It tells us that we can still count on the covert operations people at the C.I.A.—the men who planned the Bay of Pigs, carried on a secret war in Laos, subsidized cultural organizations and foreign politicians, and provided technical aid for the White House burglary squad.

What we want is to keep such things secret. Right? National security demands that the American people have no idea of the political tricks and covert wars carried on in their name, even years ago. Right?

Those propositions may sound absurd but they would be serious if the C.I.A. and the Justice Department prevail in a legal argument they are making right now in the Federal District Court in Alexandria, Va. The case is one that ought to concern anyone who cares about freedom and public control of government in the United States.

It all began when Victor Marchetti, a respected official of the C.I.A. from 1955 to 1969, decided to write a book about it. The agency went to court and got an order barring him from publishing anything, "factual, fictional or otherwise," without its consent. The basis for the injunction was that Marchetti, in going to work for the C.I.A., had agreed not to disclose classified matters.

With the help of a former Foreign Service officer, John Marks, Marchetti went ahead and wrote his book. He

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sent it to the agency, where 50 people spent 1,700 hours going over it. (Who were they? The imagination reels.) They ordered 339 passages cut—a fifth of the book.

Marchetti pleaded that many of the censored items had already appeared in print. C.I.A. officials thought again and agreed to reduce their deletions to 225. We can see the restored 114, and they give an idea of the sort of thing censors would cut if they had their way. For example:

- A paragraph about a program to send balloons from Taiwan over mainland China, carrying propaganda.

- References to Air America as a "C.I.A.-owned airline" in Indochina—very likely the worst-kept secret in official history.

- Numerous mentions of the well-known fact that the C.I.A., in the 1950's, supported efforts to overthrow the Sukarno Government in Indonesia.

- An eight-word passage saying that the British secret service helped Greville Wynne, an Englishman jailed by the Soviet Union as a spy, to write a book.

- A statement that some supposed journalists overseas actually work for the C.I.A.—a fact leaked by the C.I.A. itself recently.

- A descriptive phrase saying that a story by Seymour Hersh of The New York Times about secret C.I.A. payments to one wing of the Italian Christian Democratic party was "thoroughly verified."

British ghosting, newspaper adjectives, intelligence fiascos of the past: Those are the molehills that fifty people labored 1,700 hours to turn into national security mountains. It is easy to laugh at such bumbledom, as Taylor Branch called it in an acid analysis of the case in last month's Harper's magazine. Marchetti's publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, is thinking of publishing the book with blanks and sending the missing words to buyers if and when it wins the case.

But of course it is not really funny. The United States needs more light on its national security policies, not less. Policy-making by experts without public scrutiny is what got us into such disasters as Vietnam.

Judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. has ordered the C.I.A. to produce reasons for its 225 deletions in the Marchetti manuscript, and to clear some experts who can help Marchetti argue against them. This has brought protests from the C.I.A. director, William E. Colby, who wants a secret hearing to tell the judge why he can't do that.

A certain skepticism about Mr. Colby is in order. He helped to create that sinister C.I.A. operation, the Phoenix program, to arrest, torture and assassinate suspected dissidents in Vietnam; he may understandably prefer darkness to light.

In fact, it would be awkward to have to justify classifications to a court. But the trouble lies in a system that classifies everything important as a secret. Marchetti and Marks are reasonable men and might well have agreed if they had been asked to drop two or three references to serious current intelligence matters. Instead, the C.I.A. went to court with its dangerous broadside argument.

Everyone who works on classified material promises not to disclose it. If that "contract" can bring an injunction years later, free speech will have been drastically reduced. When some official resigns from Government in disagreement with, say, the invasion of Cambodia, he will not only have his telephone tapped; Henry Kissinger will try to enjoin him from expressing his disagreement. It would be hard to overstate the danger of that prospect.