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Another CIA Venture

THE PUBLIC CONFIRMATION that Central Intelligence Agency operations in Laos for the past eight years have been masked as foreign-aid projects will not startle anyone who has attempted to study that most shadowy of Government agencies. The CIA track record is one of frequent duplicity, and the American people and their elected representatives have been as often the victims as friendly or hostile foreign governments.

It is the long-range effect of later disclosure that is the most damaging and harmful result of many CIA masquerades. Because of its corrupting courtship with private foundations, and student and trade union organizations, it has made American university, student and union programs abroad suspect. Many of its quietly financed ventures wore the disguise of humanitarian causes, but with finances mysterious and true sponsorship concealed. When sponsorship was revealed, the programs came tumbling down and, with them, much of the belief in and support for all foreign aid programs.

NOW JOHN A. HANNAH, administrator of the Agency for International Development, has confirmed the CIA's use of AID in Laos but has also insisted that the deception is not going on in any other nation. Officials of other underdeveloped areas receiving American assistance are not apt to accept Hannah's assurance unquestioningly. Thus the CIA may have damaged American programs to build friendship in many nations because it damaged credibility in one.

It has been Moscow's repeated accusation, for instance, that the Peace Corps, one of this country's more magnanimous and hopeful contributions, represents only an extension of CIA meddling. The Laos disclosure tends to lend support to this Soviet view. The CIA's expediency may thus have harmed a totally innocent victim in the Peace Corps and, with it, the long-term national interest.