

Leaders of Student Group Explain Link With C.I.A.



Eugene Groves, president of the National Student Association, at news conference.



Richard Stearns, international affairs vice president, at the Washington session.

Associated Press Wirephotos

State Department Affirms C.I.A. Gave Students Aid

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By NEIL SHEEHAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14—The State Department acknowledged today that the Central Intelligence Agency had subsidized some of the overseas activities of the National Student Association since the

Student Association since the

early nineteen-fifties.

But department officials privately defended the subsidy as necessary to offset the influence in international student circles of heavily financed and controlled Communist student groups.

The State Department announcement came amid reports that President Johnson had instructed the C.I.A. to close out all secret programs of aid to student groups. He also reportedly called for a review of all other programs intended to combat Communist activities in private organizations.

A spokesman for the department also confirmed that the association's leaders had worked for the last two years to terminate the relationship, and asserted that "even prior to that time the degree of governmental support for those activities had been tapering off sharply."

Feared Criticism

Officials said privately that the C.I.A. subsidy to the association, the largest college student organization in the country, had been in effect since 1952 with the knowledge and approval of "high levels of Government." The officials would not elaborate on this term, but they presumably meant the White House.

The subsidy was approved, officials said, to allow American students to compete in international student affairs against the heavily financed and controlled Communist student fronts of the nineteen-fifties. Private funds for overseas activities of the student association were not available at that time.

The subsidy was made "covert," the officials said, because it was decided that public disclosure of Government financing would have opened the organization to Communist attacks as an instrument of the United States Government. Communist student fronts do

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not acknowledge their government financing.

Knowledge of the relationship with the C.I.A. was limited to two senior officers of the association each year, the State Department spokesman said. Officials denied that the subsidy had limited the freedom of the organization or influenced its policies.

They conceded, however, that the existence of the subsidy raised this question.

Eugene Groves, president of the association, said yesterday that the subsidy had continued until last year. He said that as of this year the association was no longer receiving C.I.A. funds, to his knowledge.

Other officers of the association said today, however, that they believed the C.I.A. was still paying the rent for the organization's offices here through an organization called the Independence Foundation of Boston.

Mr. Groves's acknowledgment of the C.I.A. subsidy came in response to inquiries about a forthcoming article in the March issue of Ramparts magazine, which, according to Ramparts spokesmen, describes in detail the relationship between the intelligence agency and the student organization.

Letter to President

Meanwhile, eight Democratic Congressmen asked President Johnson to open an "immediate investigation at the highest level" into C.I.A. financing of the student organization.

In a letter to the President, the Congressmen said they were "appalled" at the news of the subsidy. They charged that "it represents an unconscionable extension of power by an agency of government over institutions outside its jurisdiction."

The letter was sent by Representatives Benjamin Rosenthal, William F. Ryan and John G. Dow Jr. of New York; George E. Brown Jr., Phillip Burton and Don Edwards of California; John Conyers Jr. of Michigan and Robert W. Kastenmeier of Wisconsin.

Richard Stearns, international affairs vice president of the student association, said today that the C. I. A. had not attempted to prevent the organization from terminating the subsidy when intelligence officials were informed that the student leaders wanted to end the relationship.

Other officers of the association, said, however, that in the last few weeks, after it was learned that the Ramparts article would appear, C. I. A. officials did attempt to persuade the student leaders not to acknowledge the subsidy publicly.

The C.I.A. officials believed, the student officers said, that the organization would be best able to survive whatever public protest was created by the

Ramparts article by simply denying the relationship

But the student leaders said they had decided not to follow the agency's advice. C.I.A. officials would not comment on the matter.

Despite the explanation of the subsidy given today by State Department officials, leaders of the student group said today that they believed the disclosure of their relationship with the C.I.A. had put the future of their organization in great doubt.

It could destroy the association's credibility as an independent and liberal student group with students both at home and abroad, they said.

The student leaders said they were also concerned that those foreign students who had worked with the association would be hurt by the news.

Some association officers were frantically writing letters today to student leaders in Africa and Latin America in an effort to explain the C.I.A. relationship.

'A Nightmare for Us'

"This has become a nightmare for us," one student leader said. "Our whole credibility has been based on the image that we are independent and left liberals. Now everything we do or have done will be tainted whether we're guilty or not."

Association officers said that only two or three senior officials of the organization knew of the relationship with the C.I.A. each year. The association changes its leadership each year.

Most staff members first learned of the C.I.A. subsidy a few weeks ago when senior officers told them of it because of the forthcoming Ramparts article.

Since then, one student officer said, there has been great emotional anguish among the staff. "Ninety per cent of them wouldn't have had anything to do with this organization if they'd known about the C.I.A. business before they joined," he said.

The association's National Supervisory Board met here tonight to discuss the future of the organization. The board is composed of 10 student government leaders from campuses throughout the country.

Mr. Stearns said that neither he nor Mr. Groves were planning to submit resignations, and that they had so far not received any resignations from the staff.

At the moment, he said, the leadership hoped to weather the storm and preserve the organization.

The association has chapters on more than 300 American campuses, where about 1.5 million students are studying. Association membership is based on local student government organizations rather than individual students.