

London Report

The Story of A Secret CIA News Agency

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The Central Intelligence Agency secretly created a news service here, Forum World Features, supplying political and other articles to newspapers around the world, according to knowledgeable officials.

The agency quietly closed the 9-year-old operation in April for at least two reasons, these officials say.

First, the sources said, the CIA is withdrawing from covert propaganda activities of this kind. Second, the agency is said to have feared that Philip Agee or some other dissident ex-CIA officer would blow Forum World Features' cover.

When it began selling articles in 1966, the service's owner of record was John Hay Whitney, former U.S. ambassador to Britain and chairman of the International Herald Tribune. Early in 1973, Whitney was replaced by Richard Mellon Scaife, who has held a variety of posts with the huge Mellon interests in oil and banking.

Whitney's secretary in New York said he had "no comment on the subject" of CIA involvement in the news operation. A three-day effort to reach Scaife for comment was unsuccessful.

Editors in London who bought articles from Forum World Features say the service was highly professional. Its day-to-day operations were supervised by Brian Crozier, a well-known British writer of right-wing views.

Crozier's clients recall only rare attempts at what would seem to be propaganda, thus bolstering the service's credibility. His editors said that propaganda was apparent in articles dealing with Vietnam, where the service gave strong support to the official American position.

Ian Wright, foreign editor of the Guardian, recalled that one slanted story from Forum World Features did slip past a predecessor's desk. It reported that Somalia had received 150 MIG-17 fighter-bombers from the Soviet Union. A few weeks later, Wright said, the paper set the record straight with an account of Somalia's 12 MIGs.

The disclosure of Forum World Features' CIA parentage was first made in Time Out, a weekly that blends left-wing political commentary with an entertainment guide. The link has now been confirmed by knowledgeable officials.

Time Out also published what it now says was a copy of an internal CIA memorandum discussing the news service. Intelligence sources here have said that the text sounds authentic.

The memo is addressed to

"DCI," probably former Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, and appears from internal evidence to have been written in 1968. As printed in Time Out, it says:

"Forum World Features, Ltd., (FWF) is an international news feature service located in London and incorporated in Delaware whose overt aim is to provide on a commercial basis a comprehensive weekly service covering international affairs, economics, science and medicine, book reviews and other subjects of a general nature. In its first two years, FWF has provided the United States with a significant means to counter Communist prop (sic) and has become a respected feature service well on the way to a position of prestige in the journalism world. Begun as a commercial entity in January 1966, FWF was created from the residue of Forum Service, an activity of the Cong. for Cultural Freedom (CCF) from which CIA withdrew its support in 1966."

Beneath the unsigned memo is written in hand: "Run W. Knowledge and cooperation of British intelligence."

The handwritten line reflects the ground rules under which CIA operates here. Officials say that the agency, which has a substantial staff at the embassy in London, largely performs a liaison function, shares information with its British counterparts. Forum World Features was a special case and, in accord with the convention, could operate only with the blessing and knowledge of the British intelligence services.

Crozier indignantly denied in a telephone interview that the news agency had any link with the CIA. He readily acknowledged that it was an offshoot of a CIA giveaway news service, but insisted that he had broken the tie to the agency.

He said that it was possible some of the freelance journalists from whom he bought articles were in the pay of the CIA.

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