

University Project Cloaked C.I.A. Role In Saigon, 1955-59

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Michigan State University was disclosed today to have provided the support and cover for operations of the Central Intelligence Agency in South Vietnam from 1955 to 1959.

It did so while operating a seven-year, multimillion-dollar technical assistance program that trained police and other public officials for the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem at the behest of the United States Government.

The intelligence agency's involvement was disclosed by Ramparts magazine and Stanley K. Scheinbaum, former coordinator of the university's Vietnam project, an economist who is now with the Center for Democratic Studies in Santa Barbara, Calif.

They cited the C.I.A.'s involvement in support of charges that Michigan State and other universities "on the make" were lending scholars to Government agencies in exchange for lucrative contracts and exciting overseas assignments.

Prof. Ralph Smuckler, acting dean in the Office of International Programs at Michigan State, confirmed the role of the C.I.A. in the Vietnam project, which he headed. He described the Ramparts article as false and distorted in many respects, but he acknowledged there had been a reluctant relationship with C.I.A. agents.

Prof. Robert Scigliano, a former assistant chief of the project, said he had not read the Ramparts article closely but described as "absolutely correct" the report that the university had operated as "cover for a C.I.A. team" until July, 1959.

He said he had written a book generally critical of the project and the Diem regime that alluded to this. But he was upset, he added, by Ramparts' "inaccurate" quotation of him.

Professor Smuckler implied some difficulties in severing the C.I.A. connection.

"It may not have been right to get into it," he said in a telephone interview from the campus in East Lansing, Mich. "We were caught and felt we had to follow through."

The university tried to rid itself of the connection as early as 1956, he indicated, but it took until 1959 to terminate the arrangement.

Other university officials, from President John A. Hannah down, said they would not dignity the charges with a formal reply and could not deal with the massive job of rebutting its points one by one. However, James Dennison, the university spokesman, who played a small role in the Vietnam project, said, "Whatever Professor Smuckler says is our reply."

Prof. Alfred Meyer of the Michigan State political science department said it was now conceded at the university that there had been some fronting for the C.I.A. But he said that the full story was in dispute and was not likely ever to be known.

Professor Meyer said that Dr. Hannah had alerted the Academic Council to expect a hostile article in Ramparts and had conceded that there was "a certain amount of substance" in its allegations.

Professor Smuckler had hired Rampart's informant, Mr. Scheinbaum, for the Vietnam project. He said he may, as the article states, have been the first to tell Mr. Scheinbaum that the men "borrowed" from the Government for the project were C.I.A. agents interested in police and other "countersubversion" activities. These men were nominally from the Department of the Army.

But almost everything else in the Ramparts article struck Professor Smuckler as distorted or wrong.

He disputed its calculation of the cost of the Vietnam project, its portrayal of the relationship with the agency, its account of the circumstances under which the university project was ended and its basic argument that universities had no right to engage in foreign operations.

The C.I.A., which declined immediate comment on the article, is known to have had various operational relationships with universities. In recent years, the agency is said to have limited itself to more or less open dealings with academic consultants and with research institutions.

In 1950, the agency contributed \$300,000 to the creation of the Center for International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and sustained it with subsequent grants in return for many studies of the Soviet Union and Communist activities. The relationship did not become public until it had virtually ended several years ago, but M.I.T. found that the disclosure hurt its other activities abroad and aroused resentment and controversy among faculty members.

Since then, other educators have expressed concern about the C.I.A.'s involvement in academic and foundation activities. Officials of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations have contended that no infiltration of educational activities has been authorized in recent years and the few formal dealings were well known to the heads of cooperating institutions.

Ties Rejected by Harvard

Harvard and some other universities have long refused institutional ties and have let individual scholars decide whether they wish to have any dealings with the intelligence agency.

Ramparts, an iconoclastic West Coast magazine founded by Roman Catholic laymen, has been especially outspoken against United States policy in Vietnam.

Its article, "The University on the Make—or How M.S.U. Helped Arm Madame Nhu," makes the following major points:

¶The university neglected scholarship and suspended its critical function in society by obediently serving American policy in Vietnam and advising "on the very writing of South Vietnam's Constitution." One professor, Wesley Fishel, was described as instrumental in helping to install Ngo Dinh Diem as President of South Vietnam and selling him on the technical assistance program that brought Michigan State \$25-million worth of projects.

¶At least five men hired by the university as "police administration specialists" and given "faculty rank" operated in Saigon as a separate unit in "counterespionage and counterintelligence" assignments.

¶In helping to train South Vietnamese internal security forces, the university project at first "actually supplied them with guns and ammunition" and directed an operation that at one point had only four university persons among 33 police specialists recruited throughout the United States.

¶Some university reports were written to please President Diem and to protect the project, under which some professors were earning nearly twice their normal salaries, tax free, and were gaining rapid promotion. The project was canceled by President Diem in 1962 because he was displeased with the critical articles by some professors.