

CIA Weighing Action Against Agee

Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

Top CIA officials are debating whether to bring legal action against Philip Agee, whose book about his life in the CIA has caused havoc.

Agee listed everyone who had worked with him in the CIA in Latin America. He also added names provided, he said, by "a small group of Mexican comrades who I trained to follow the comings and goings of CIA people before I left Mexico City."

It has cost the CIA "several million dollars," according to inside sources, to transfer the agents who had been fingered and to protect its operations in Latin America.

The CIA, however, couldn't protect all the local people whom Agee listed as CIA "collaborators." Among them were many who had only routine dealings with the CIA in such legitimate activities as drug control, anti-hijacking techniques and anti-terrorist operations.

A number of them have been harassed with threatening phone calls. One reported that his daughter's life had been threatened and the wall in front of his home had been defaced.

In Uruguay, a taxi driver whose name appeared in Agee's book stopped at a traffic light. Another car pulled alongside

him, and an assailant emptied a pistol at the taxi. The driver miraculously escaped injury.

In Ecuador, an engineer on Agee's list appeared at the U.S. embassy to plead for protection.

CIA officials doubt that they can bring legal charges against Agee as long as he stays out of the country, our sources say. Agee told us by transatlantic telephone that he hopes to return home but that he will wait until he gets the green light from his legal adviser.

He is represented by Melvin Wulf, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney, who said he will withhold his advice until he talks to the Justice Department and learns its intentions.

"The only action they could bring against Agee," Wulf told us, "would be an espionage charge, and that would be a fruitless prosecution."

Indeed, this may be precisely what the CIA has in mind. Our own CIA sources say Agee has been kept under surveillance and that he has been spotted in the company of Cuban intelligence agents in Paris and London.

Agee doesn't deny this. "I have seen them in Paris and London," he acknowledged to us. "I go straight to the Cuban embassy. Whether they were Cuban intelligence officers or not, I don't really care."

He added meaningfully: "I support the Cuban revolution." He emphasized, that he had never been debriefed by either the Soviet KGB or Cuban intelligence. But on his own initiative, he told us, he had gone to insurgent leaders and had informed them of his CIA activities against them.

"I am for the liberation movements," he said.

One source showed us documentation, which suggests but doesn't prove that Agee is under Cuban discipline. A press release, which Agee issued in London on Oct. 3, 1974, appears to have been written by the Cubans. Our source showed us language peculiarities, which indicate it was translated from colloquial Cuban Spanish.

This is denied by Agee. "I wrote that," he declared, "right on my own typewriter in Cornwall (England)." But he acknowledged that it had been duplicated for the press in the offices of a left-wing Latin American publication in London.

Our CIA sources also believe that Agee pulled his punches on Mexico's President Luis Echeverria after receiving instructions from Havana.

On Oct. 3, Agee denounced the Mexican press for omitting his account of a "close relationship" that he claimed existed

between a CIA official and Echeverria.

"Mexican comrades have told me," said Agee, "that the reference to Echeverria's relationship with (the CIA man) was probably omitted by official censorship order, in itself not uncommon there, in order to save embarrassment to the incumbent." Agee carefully added that Echeverria "may have broken with the CIA when he became president."

A subsequent Agee interview, linking Echeverria with the CIA, was published in the December issue of the Colombian magazine "Alternativa."

Fidel Castro, eager to continue his good relations with Echeverria, sent a member of the Cuban politburo, Carlos Rafel Rodriguez, on a secret one-day visit to Mexico City on Dec. 18 to placate the Mexican president, according to our CIA sources.

Not long afterward, Agee got together with the interviewer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a left-wing, Nobel Prize writer, in Spain, say our sources. Both men issued statements exonerating Echeverria.

Agee denied to us that he received any instructions from Havana to soften his attack on the Mexican president.

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