

CIA News Service Reported

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

The agency quietly closed down the nine-year-old operation in April for at least two reasons, these officials said. First, they 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, according to the officials, 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.

[In New York, Whitney's 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 that 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 has denied that the news agency had any link with the CIA.

Crozier's clients recall only

rare attempts at what would seem to be propaganda, thus bolstering the service's credibility. The 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 into the paper in the 1960s. It reported that Somalia had received 150 Mig-17 fighter bombers from the Soviet Union. Wright, who was not foreign editor at the time, said that a few weeks later the newspaper set the record straight with an account of Somalias 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, sharing 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.

Editor 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.

Crozier said he became director of Forum World Features in 1965 when he was told that Whitney had bought it. Thereafter, he said, he struggled to break the remaining links to the CIA's Congress

for Cultural Freedom, and succeeded in 1966.

He said that it was possible that some of the free-lance journalists from whom he brought articles were in the pay of the CIA. When asked whether he knew there was CIA money or support for the service itself, he replied:

"Not to my knowledge," He then hung up.

Crozier also insisted that he had left Forum World Features in June 1974. However, documents here that were filed with the Department of Trade when the service closed down on April 29 list Crozier as the "person running the business."

His deputy, Ian Hamilton also described the CIA link as "a whole fabrication of rubbish." Hamilton says that Scaife wound down the service because it was running at a loss.

Like Crozier, Hamilton suggested that he may have been duped by what he called "paid hacks" working for the CIA.

Undoubtedly, many of the free-lancers — and perhaps some of the editors — did not know about the CIA sponsorship.

In fact, Forum World Features was very careful about the writers from whom it took copy. One American free-lancer living in Britain sold several articles to the agency, but then was told it could buy no more. "You have a Jewish name," an editor explained, "and our clients in the Middle East would not like that byline."

A new home has been found by both editors: the Institute for the Study of Conflict.