

Newsmen Oppose Ban On CIA-Press Contacts

Washington

Legislation barring CIA contacts with journalists overseas would be unworkable and potentially damaging to the agency's operations, a House committee was told yesterday by a veteran foreign correspondent.

And, said another of four former foreign correspondents appearing before a House intelligence oversight committee, such a law would not protect American reporters from being suspected of spying.

The four testified on the second day of the subcommittee's hearings on the CIA's practice — now being disavowed by the agency — of using journalists as paid sources of intelligence.

All agreed that ethical guidelines should be followed by news media in their contacts with intelligence agencies, but expressed doubt that congressionally imposed limitations would work.

Joseph Fromm, who served 28 years abroad for U.S. News and World Report and is now deputy editor at the magazine's Washington headquarters, told the panel:

"If carried to its logical conclusion, I suspect that new legislation of this sort either would prove unworkable — and invite systematic violation — or would

emasculate the CIA's clandestine collection of intelligence.

"Neither result would serve the national interest nor contribute to greater independence of the news media."

Tad Szulc, a free-lance writer and former reporter for the Associated Press, United Press International and the New York Times, said if Congress outlawed CIA contacts with American correspondents, "I doubt if it would be believed" by foreign governments.

He said the Soviet Union and other Communist nations would continue to expel reporters who fall out of favor and brand them as spies.

Fromm, Szulc and Herman Nickel, a Time magazine foreign correspondent for 20 years and now with Fortune magazine, said they saw nothing wrong with exchanging information and checking tips with CIA agents.

But Ward Just, a former Washington Post reporter now free-lancing, said he wants nothing to do with the agency.

The four were unanimous in opposing the use of reporters for purely intelligence work — paid or unpaid.

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