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'AGING' OF STAFF A C.I.A. PROBLEM

Spies Are Too Old and Too Numerous, Director Says

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James R. Schlesinger, the Director of Central Intelligence, has told Congress that a major problem confronting the Central Intelligence Agency is that its spies are becoming too old and too numerous.

The difficulty, he explained in recent testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, is that agents in clandestine overseas operations have "stayed around as long as they have wanted." As a result, he said, "we have an aging staff" in the agency's operations division that handles overseas activities and there is little room for promotion of aspiring young spies.

Suggestions that some of the spies have come to look upon their jobs as "a sinecure," Mr. Schlesinger said:

"The intelligence community of the United States is not designed to provide cushy positions for time-servers."

Mr. Schlesinger testified before the committee early last month in support of legislation that would raise from 830 to 1,200 the number of former overseas agents whom the agency can retire at the age of 50 after 20 years of service. His slightly censored testimony was made public today in one of the rare occasions when the testimony of a Central Intelligence Director has been published.

Many Recruited After War

Since taking over as director in February, Mr. Schlesinger has begun a major reorganization of intelligence activities, including the largest personnel cutback in the history of the agency. From his testimony, which provided the first official explanation of his plans for personnel reorganization, it is apparent that one of Mr. Schlesinger's major objective is to weed out over-age spies through retirement.

Mr. Schlesinger disclosed that in recent years the intelligence agency had reduced its

"overseas population," with some of the agents absorbed into the headquarters staff and others retired. But, he said, it still has "too many people in the operational areas," particularly as it turns increasingly to technological means, such as satellites, for obtaining intelligence information.

This surplus of operatives, he said, is compounded by the problem of the agency's clandestine service. "We are facing a very severe hump in age composition" between 1970 and 1980, he said.

Immediately after World War II, in its formative years, the intelligence agency engaged in an extensive recruitment program, particularly on Ivy League campuses. Most of those post-war recruits are now reaching the age of 50 or more but show little desire to leave the agency.

The agency's problem, Mr. Schlesinger said, is that, unlike the military or foreign service, it has no system for "selecting out" agents as they move up in seniority.

"It has been assumed that people come in and de facto they have stayed around as long as they wanted," he said. "As a result, we have an aging staff."

Promotions Delayed

As compared with the rest of the Government, the director said, the intelligence agency has a disproportionately old staff. For example, he said, about 70 per cent of the agency's employees in executive grade positions are over 45, compared with about 50 per cent in other Government agencies.

Mr. Schlesinger attributed some of the agency's morale problems to the overlay of older agents, with the resulting "reduced opportunity for younger people." In the early days of the agency, he said, a person could expect to acquire executive responsibilities by age 48 but now he must wait until age 55.

Consequently, he said, "we had a movement out of some of our younger people whom we would like to retain in order to build for 20 years ahead."

Mr. Schlesinger acknowledged that his personnel reorganization and reductions had caused morale problems and criticism within the agency. But he suggested that this reaction should be balanced against the morale problems of persons who left the agency "because they saw insufficient opportunity, partly because they did not believe that the agency was vigorous enough, that it had become a tired bureaucracy."