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Reports Say CIA Has Okay For European Anti-Red Acts

DEC. 26

By LEO RENNERT

McClatchy Newspapers Staff Writer.

WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency has received a go-ahead to provide covert assistance to non-Communists political groups in Western Europe, according to informed sources.

The CIA's assignment reportedly has as one of its prime targets Italy, where Communists appear to be gaining political strength.

The project, reminiscent of massive undercover aid extended by the U.S. to anti-Communist labor groups and other organizations right after World War II, is believed to have been ordered by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

According to one source, Kissinger has been deeply troubled by Communist inroads in Portugal and muscle-flexing by leftists in Spain following the death of Francisco Franco.

Based on these concerns, it is said, Kissinger apparently feels the U.S. has an obligation to strengthen democratic forces in Italy and other parts of western Europe where Communists are on the ascendancy.

However, the CIA plans already have prompted strong criticism in high government circles and could engulf the Ford Administration in the same type of controversy as its secret intervention in Angola.

Critics maintain that the western European operation is bound to be counter-productive because, when its cover inevitably is blown, Communists will have a heyday denouncing their political opponents as CIA stooges.

The net effect, according to this view, will be to strengthen Communist groups and to isolate the U.S. from traditional European friends who will resent external interference in their domestic political process.

"It could be another disaster like the destabilization stuff we pulled in Chile," said one critic.

The CIA refused to confirm or deny its new involvement in western European domestic politics. A spokesman said the agency never comments on covert activities but added: "Whatever we do is in total compliance with the law."

So far, outlays for the western European project are at a level below the \$25 million spent in Angola, one source reported.

CIA Director William Colby, it was learned, has briefed several key congressional panels but lawmakers in the know are reluctant to discuss

the matter because they are pledged to secrecy.

"I don't know and if I did know, I wouldn't tell you," said House Majority Whip John McFall of California, who serves on the CIA

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CIA Involved?

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appropriations subcommittee.
Rep. Leo Ryan, D-San Mateo County, a member of the International Relations Committee, said he could not "flatly" confirm the report because of his panel's secret-communication arrangements with the CIA.

But he expressed sharp criticism of current CIA covert operations and said he would be strongly opposed to any secret U.S. manipulation of European political contests.

"First of all, I doubt that we'd be successful trying to hold up some tired, old political hacks just because they're not Communists," he remarked.

"And even if we were successful, let's say in a place like Italy, we'd lose every other country in Europe because of our clumsy interference."

"Why, if we're going to proceed on this course, let's have the Tories in England contribute money to Ronald

Reagan's campaign here. It's in-
sane." According to one informant, Colby ran into blistering criticism when he barred the western European project to the International Relations Committee during a closed-door session earlier this month. Rep. Wayne Hays, D-Ohio, a powerful senior House member who keeps close tabs on the State Department, is said to have been among those who voiced strong objections.

"Wayne Hays damn near tore Colby's head off," said one source.

When asked to comment on the information obtained by The Bee, Ryan said he plans to ask the House when Congress returns next month to change present procedures which keep most lawmakers in the dark about CIA operations and prevent those with some knowledge from speaking out when they feel the agency has embarked on the wrong course.

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