

The night they grilled the CIA

By Henry Brandon
Washington

THE Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William Colby, proved yesterday that in his days as an undercover agent he had learnt how to survive alone in hostile territory. He spoke at a conference on the CIA and covert activities, hosted on Capitol Hill by Senators Edward Brooke (Republican, Massachusetts) and Phillip Hart (Democrat, Michigan): it was as if General Sir Walter Walker had come to address a TUC meeting.

Mr Colby faced a hostile panel of well-known critics of the CIA, including seven former members of the agency like Daniel Ellsberg, and also an obviously hostile audience that consisted mostly of 300 young "new Left" CIA-haters. He not only defended the CIA's role, after two days of speeches by critics, but also sought to promote a legislative proposal for the equivalent of an official secrets act to protect "good secrets."

Questions about the CIA's activities in the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile, which surfaced as the result of a congressional "leak," Mr Colby fended off by saying that he would answer them only in executive session of the appropriate congressional committees. However, he claimed that the CIA's involvements in covert action are undertaken only as directed by the National Security Council and



Colby: survival lesson

that "they are frankly and regularly reported to the appropriate committees, and they require only a small proportion of our effort and time."

When Mr Colby said the CIA had no connection with the military coup that overthrew Allende, but that agency "looked forward to a change in the government there by democratic means," the generally good-natured audience broke into laughter. He added that he had reread his secret testimony of last April which leaked out here earlier in the week, and found that he had not used the phrase "destabilise the Allende government" which he was quoted as having used in describing the application of clandestine funds that had been authorised by the "Forty Committee" of the National Security Council.

When asked how much specific

information Congress is given about covert actions, Mr Colby said it was "made aware at appropriate times of various major actions," and when asked whether the American ambassadors in Chile were kept informed of covert activities there, he replied that such information is primarily given to the Under Secretary of State and that ambassadors are informed on a "need-to-know basis."

He refused to say whether those ambassadors to Chile who had testified before Congress that the US to their knowledge, maintained a "hands-off" policy had lied. He insisted, however, that all major efforts and money spent in Chile were known to several committees of Congress and that therefore the CIA, in the end, remains accountable to the voters.

Asked whether there would now be a conflict of interest between Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller and his enterprises in Latin America—which the questioner claimed had been used as cover for intelligence operations—Mr Colby, who always maintained a truly stiff upper lip however insulting or indiscreet the question, replied that this was, "No useful subject for discussion."

To a question about whether the CIA intended to intervene to prevent Greece from leaving NATO, Mr Colby replied that Greece's action had no immediate adverse effect on the security of the US and furthermore that

covert actions have no impact on current activities.

Daniel Ellsberg congratulated Mr Colby on the CIA's participation in getting the famous secret speech of Mr Khrushchev in 1956, and then seemed to place his own feat of leaking the Pentagon Papers in the same category. Mr Colby recalled that when President Nixon introduced him to Mr Brezhnev on his visit to Washington and the Russian leader asked the CIA director whether he was a dangerous man, he replied that he was not, and that "the more the US and Russia know about each other the safer we will be."

When asked how many people he had killed in connection with Operation Phoenix in Vietnam, Mr Colby eagerly replied, "none," and added that the majority were killed in military combat or police action. His interest was to capture the Viet Cong, he said, because a dead man could not impart information.

In his speech, Mr Colby sought to shift the emphasis from covert operations because, he said, the CIA's predominant role now is concerned with information and analytical responsibilities. Though he had to endure some strong language—such as being called an "assassin"—he was also given credit by some, like the Director of the Centre for National Security Studies, who said: "What a wonderful thing that you came to face your critics."

Incomplete as received.