

Commentary

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The CIA Goes After A Book

By James Wrightson, Associate Editor

STRIKE — One thing is certain about the US Central Intelligence Agency. No one knows where it will strike next. Figuring out where the cloak-and-dagger fellows will turn up is like guessing the number of jelly beans in a jar or predicting when they will finish the street repairs in front of your house or when your in-laws will drop in for dinner the next time.

Of course there are certain events the CIA is NOT interested in — apple pie bake offs, watermelon contests, a Burlington Liars Club get-together, an apple bob, spin-the-bottle or a back-gammon game.

When the fellows from the woodsy CIA campus in Langley, Va., get interested in something they go all out. And when they do their policies are right out of King Herod. It must have been a CIA operative in the crowd who started shouting: "Give us Barrabas."

The latest example is the Central Intelligence Agency's ham-handed attempt to stop publication of a book by Alfred McCoy, a Yale graduate student, called: "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia."

McCoy's book charged the Central Intelligence Agency has known of Thai and South Vietnamese official involvement in heroin traffic, has covered up their involvement and has participated in aspects of the traffic itself.

DENIED — The CIA, of course, has denied all this. We are not concerned here with the pinpoint accuracy of McCoy's book or his methods of research, although the CIA could turn up no gross errors in fact.

What is of deep concern is the way the CIA, a powerful and prestigious government agency, applied pressure to Harper & Row not to publish the book.

In an exchange of letters, the general counsel of the CIA asked to see the book prior to publication saying: "It is our belief that no reputable publishing house would wish to publish such allegations without being assured the supporting evidence was valid."

Admittedly under fire in the book, the agency said it should have the role as the validator.

Clifford Irving hoax in mind, was supersensitive to the axiom: A publisher has the ultimate responsibility for checking the reliability of the material he proposes to publish. So overriding the author's objections, it got the galley proofs of "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia" and a courier from the CIA headquarters came to New York and took them back to Virginia.

Apparently after a page-by-page review the CIA could not, try as it did, demonstrate the author's evidence did not support his assertions.

REVIEW — In a letter to the general counsel of the CIA the publisher said: "Based upon careful review, it is our sincere opinion Mr. McCoy's scholarship remains unshaken and we do not see any reason for making any changes in the text."

That would end it, except for the fact this is neither the government's nor the CIA's first venture into the dangerous business of trying to im-

pose prepublication restraints on words and ideas the citizens of this country are to read and consider.

The memory of the Justice Department's outcry against the Pentagon Papers is still green. The CIA has an unenviable record in this regard. In recent years the agency has tried to use its influence on Random House, Putnam, Harper and has gone into court to try to dictate what the people of this country shall read about the CIA.

The supersecret agency just cannot have it both ways. It cannot be a supersecret, never-to-be-spoken-of, behind-the-scenes intelligence-gathering agency, then come storming out of the shadows when it believes it might be hurt by something printed about its activities.

The CIA's action in trying to stop the publication "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia" is about as helpful to the cause of freedom of information in this country as the Stamp Act was to King George.

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