

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A18

THE WASHINGTON POST
26 May 1981

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Peace Corps' Image

Because President Reagan's nominee to head ACTION, Tom Pauken, served in military intelligence in Vietnam 12 years ago, Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) wants to take the Peace Corps out from under ACTION and put it in the State Department. He claims that if Mr. Pauken is anywhere near the Peace Corps his background will scare people in the Third World and perhaps endanger Peace Corps volunteers.

This is the same debate that has been carried on since the Peace Corps' founding; and by now it is one of those arguments that may mean something in Washington, but has no reality beyond the Potomac.

Ever since the Peace Corps began 20 years ago, the Soviets have been trying to convince the Third World that the Peace Corps is a CIA plot, in spite of the fact that six presidents from Kennedy to Reagan have maintained strict adherence to a complete separation of the

Peace Corps and the CIA both in fact and in appearance. There is nothing in Peace Corps policy, however, that would prevent someone who has served in military intelligence many years ago from also serving in the Peace Corps as well.

Regardless of Peace Corps policy or how the agency is positioned in the federal bureaucracy, the Soviets will continue to claim that the volunteers are spies. On my first trip to Africa in 1969, Soviet propaganda and Jack Anderson claimed that I was trained and financed by the CIA. Anderson publicly retracted the claim, but the Soviets went further. Since I had played tournament tennis while in college, the Soviets pushed the line that the popular TV series "I Spy," then being syndicated in the Third World, was the story of my life.

The people of the Third World and their leaders weren't impressed by this propaganda many years ago and couldn't care less today. They have enough prob-

lems to cope with in their daily lives to worry about political machinations in Washington or appearances that the backgrounds of ACTION directors may give. Besides, these countries have witnessed and been impressed with the work of thousands of volunteers; and never has there been a single incident of spying or intelligence gathering.

So let's keep the Peace Corps in ACTION and give President Reagan and Mr. Pauken a chance to spin out some new ideas for involving people and make ACTION fulfill its mission of giving Americans of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to perform peacetime service to their country at home and abroad.

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The writer was director of the Peace Corps and of ACTION in the Nixon administration.