

C.I.A. Opened Bella Abzug's Mail, Kept 20-Year File

Angry Congresswoman Tells Colby Actions Are Outrageous

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The Central Intelligence Agency acknowledged today that it maintained a dossier for more than 20 years on Representative Bella S. Abzug, that included the contents of letters she had written on behalf of clients while she was a practicing lawyer.

The C.I.A. also acknowledged that it had opened some of the mail of the Manhattan Democrat and had retained copies of her letters in its files.

Mrs. Abzug said at a House subcommittee hearing that she had received from William E. Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence, some but not all of the documents contained in at least two separate C.I.A. files bearing her name.

The file entries, she said, dated as far back as 1953 when, as a lawyer, she represented a client before the now-defunct House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Subsequent entries included the contents of two letters she had written to an arm of the Soviet Government in 1958 and 1960 on behalf of clients of Russian ancestry. Mrs. Abzug was trying to locate other potential heirs in an estate case.

"To find myself in your files is outrageous," Mrs. Abzug stormed at Mr. Colby,

who testified today before the Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights, which the New York Democrat heads.

"Let's get one thing clear right away," she said. "Opening mail of a lawyer representing a client is clearly illegal."

Mr. Colby, who nervously drummed his fingers on the witness table during some of her outbursts, conceded to Mrs. Abzug that "a considerable amount of the material in your file should not be in there."

He also acknowledged that,

in addition to the C.I.A. "security" file begun on her in 1953, Mrs. Abzug was one of four present or former members of Congress on whom special counterintelligence files were kept as part of the agency's operations against Vietnam war dissidents.

He would not identify the three others, but said that one was no longer living. Colby said that the operation, which he said was terminated in March, 1974, had led the C.I.A. to conclude that there had been "no substantial foreign manipulation of or assistance to the antiwar movement."

The counterintelligence file, portions of which were also supplied by the C.I.A. to Mrs. Abzug, a vocal antiwar figure, included details on her Paris meeting in 1972 with representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

That file, she said, also included such items as the names of American lawyers on the mailing list of the World Peace Council, the minutes of a meeting of the Vietnam Mobilization Committee, once a leading antiwar group, and a report on a speech she made in front of the New York City Public Library.

The last report, which Mrs. Abzug made available to reporters, read in part:

"Women Strike for Peace WSP[demonstrates at New York City. Placards carried by the demonstrators called on Congress to set a definite date for United States withdrawal from Southeast Asia.

"The demonstrators were addressed by Congresswoman Bella Abzug, who told them an antiwar coalition in Congress

would force withdrawal from Southeast Asia."

Her voice rising in anger, Mrs. Abzug pointed out to Mr. Colby that her file contained the names of people attending the conference of the Women Strike for Peace, and she demanded to know how the file had been obtained.

"I do not know how we got it," he replied.

Some Data Withheld

Mr. Colby told Mrs. Abzug that he had withheld from her some of the contents of her files on the ground that, if disclosed they would make public "intelligence sources and methods."

But he said that the C.I.A. would make available to American citizens upon request the nonsensitive portions of any files the agency had compiled on them and to which they were entitled under the newly amended Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Colby added that, since the disclosure last December that the C.I.A. had kept files on 10,000 Americans as part of its intelligence-gathering on the antiwar movement, the agency had received about 60 requests for the disclosure of such information.

Mr. Colby repeatedly rejected a suggestion from Mrs. Abzug and other members of her committee that the C.I.A. had abused its legislative prohibition against domestic police functions in surveillance of the antiwar movement or other activities.

But he did concede that "some of the material which was collected by C.I.A. over the last 27 years may not be appropriate today . . ." And

he added that "a number" of such files had been destroyed.

The destruction has been halted temporarily, he said, by a request from two Congressional committees investigating intelligence activities that all agency records relevant to their inquiries be preserved.

Mr. Colby said that he had "directed, however, that the segregation process continue in the belief that, after the investigations are completed, the best disposition of these materials is destruction."

Asked by Mrs. Abzug, a Democrat, whether that meant that the C.I.A.'s files would eventually be purged of all reference to the political activities of American citizens, Mr. Colby replied that it did not.

The C.I.A., he said, would continue to conduct counterintelligence operations abroad, and to record and preserve the names of any American citizens found to be engaging in questionable political activities.

"You say you're not going to do it anymore," Mrs. Abzug said, "and yet you are going to do it."

"I said we're not going to do the questionable things," Mr. Colby responded.

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