
EDITORIALS

Opening Up Spooky Research

THE RELATIONSHIP between any scholar, or writer, and a patron is a delicate one. Because a sponsor pays good money for a particular piece of work, isn't there some motivation, either conscious or subconscious, to tailor the result to his liking? That's been a question that has troubled reasonable minds over the years. It takes guts and determination on both sides to go straight down the middle.

But it does help to make it clear just who is financing what. So the Central Intelligence Agency's recent decision to allow scholars to acknowledge its support publicly under most circumstances is a constructive step; one that should tend to calm some badly-roiled academic waters.

Shadowy CIA financing of studies at independent universities and other educational groups has been the source of nothing but trouble. Once revealed, CIA backing made an academic project immediately suspect. And considering the agency's record in the 1960s and 1970s, that was not surprising. The sound of spooks was not music to professorial ears.

CIA DEPUTY DIRECTOR Robert Gates made a good point in revealing the new guidelines. "At some point, courage is called for," said Gates. "The freedom of those who do wish to consult with us can be infringed upon by the fears of their colleagues. We do not believe that working with government to help bring about better informed policy is shameful; indeed it should be a source of pride and satisfaction."

Now that the CIA has decided to be a bit more open about its involvement, it is more likely to be just that.