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Airlie House Founder Denies CIA Link

By ROBERT WALTERS
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The founder of Airlie House flatly denies a charge that the sprawling Virginia conference center has been secretly supported by the Pentagon, State Department and Central Intelligence Agency.

"Not a single dollar of support from the CIA or any other similar organization has been offered or accepted by this institution," Dr. Murdock Head, director of the Airlie Foundation, said yesterday.

The CIA declined to comment on the charges, but government sources said the charges leveled by Washington attorney William Higgs at a press conference earlier in the day were untrue.

Higgs said that "an elaborate system of electronic bugging" equipment has been installed in Airlie's main conference building and is capable of secretly monitoring the conversations of conference participants. Head denied such use.

Higgs said "the nation's intelligence system has been intimately and secretly involved in the guiding and pulse-taking of domestic thought and politics" through its influence over the operation of the 1,200-acre conference center located just east of Warrenton, Va., in Fauquier County.

Used by U.S. Agencies

Although frequently used by the State Department and other government agencies, Airlie House also has been the site of meetings organized by groups such as the House Republican leaders, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, George Washington University and the NAACP Legal and Defense Fund.

The Airlie complex includes

several buildings, a farm, radio tower, private airport and game lodge.

In charging government involvement with Airlie, Higgs said it violated a White House policy, approved earlier this year, which stated that:

"No federal agency shall provide covert financial assistance or support, direct or indirect, to any of the nation's educational or private voluntary organizations."

Higgs, 31, has long been associated with the civil rights movement and is an active supporter of a number of radical causes. He did not say why he made the charges, but indicated that his political liberalism was at least a major reason.

Higgs graduated from the University of Mississippi and Harvard Law School. He was one of the principal strategists behind the civil rights challenge to the Mississippi delegation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Higgs said he spent four months doing research on Airlie House, checking the Airlie Foundation's tax returns, land records and other documents.

Traces Founding

He said he traced the founding of Airlie House to a 1957 memo written by Kenneth T. Young, then director of the State Department's Southeast Affairs desk, urging the creation of a private conference center in the Washington area to cultivate and train "the ruling elite" of Asian nations, and "where key officials could spend a few days of concentrated attention on this problem with specialists and officers in Washington."

Higgs said the Airlie land was

purchased for a total of about \$300,000 between 1956 and 1960.

Fifteen days after the last purchase, Head's parents, Lillian and Robert Gibson, transferred the land to him for "love and affection" but no money.

But Higgs said an investigation of the Gibsons showed that they apparently did not have the assets necessary to make such a large real-estate purchase. He said a credit report showed Gibson worked as a washing machine salesman and his wife was employed in a beauty parlor.

Current president of the foundation is Mortimer M. Caplin, former director of the Internal Revenue Service. The vice president is Joseph Sisco, Head's brother-in-law and assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, who "entered government service through the CIA in 1950," Higgs said.

Other directors, according to Higgs, include Newton Minnow, former head of the Federal Communications Commission,

and Edward L. Katzenbach Jr., brother of Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, under secretary of state.

The foundation's public tax return for 1965, the last year for which records are available, shows \$561,205 and total expenses of \$49,684. The property value is in excess of \$2 million, according to Higgs.

Between 80 and 100 persons are employed at Airlie, Head said.

He said Airlie "has been, from its inception, supported in the main by myself and my family. We have been extremely careful to avoid alliances not only with groups of this nature, but with any organizations which could have influence in the direction of the center."

Head added, "I can categorically state that this alleged support by the CIA can only be attributed to an overly fertile imagination or, for some reason unknown to us, a deliberate attempt to falsify the facts."

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