

Academic Integrity Tied To CIA-NSA Controversy

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WASHINGTON — The matter of integrity of American scholarship obviously weighed on President Johnson Wednesday when he ordered an investigation of the possibility of governmental interference with the academic community.

The investigation was ordered after disclosure that, for 14 years, the Central Intelligence Agency had been subsidizing the National Student Association.

Indicative of the significance of the controversy, persons close to the CIA were worried it might lead to a curbing of the organization's functions and add to its problems in dealing with nongovernment organizations of all types. Richard Helms, director of Central Intelligence, was described by Sen. J. Eugene McCarthy as "unhappy."

Furthermore it was regarded as almost a foregone conclusion that the disclosure of the clandestine CIA-NSA relationship would cause a sharp backfire on college campuses. For many students and teachers believe injection of CIA money into the academic community has a corrupting influence and undermines the integrity of American scholars in the eyes of the world. Though it bears only collaterally on the CIA-NSA issue, there is also fear on the campus that government subsidy threatens a degree of government control over education.

Johnson's action was announced by Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach who said in the following statement:

"The President believes strongly that the integrity and independence of the education community must be preserved. He has directed a careful review of any government activities that may endanger this integrity and independence.

"He has further directed me in consultation with John Gardner, secretary of health, education and welfare, and Director Richard Helms to formulate a policy which will provide necessary guidance for government agencies in their relationship to the international activities of American educational organizations.

"At the same time the President recognizes the great need of America's private organizations to participate in the world community. Other countries provide substantial subsidies for such activities. He has asked me to explore the means for assuring that United States organizations play their proper and vital role."

Katzenbach's statement about the President's interest in "the great need of America's private organizations to participate in the world community" approaches the heart of the CIA-NSA issue.

A key to understanding this complex issue is to take a look at the difference of the world today from the world of 1952 when the CIA began subsidizing the NSA, the country's largest and oldest student organization.

In 1952, when hostilities raged in Korea and the Cold War was at its height throughout the world, the Soviet Union under the late Josef V. Stalin was trying to dominate the globe through international communism.

One of the forms this effort took was the domination of the world's youth movement, notably through the great youth conferences that were called in various European capitals in the 1950's. With government funds Moscow sent shock troops of its own students to these conferences to take command.

Few American students, however, had money to go to Helsinki or Prague and thus, in the closing year of the Truman Administration, there was deep concern here that the United States and the free world could not hold their own in the international student movement.

To men then in charge of the CIA it seemed a perfectly natural and sensible thing to advance the money as a matter of national policy to let students go abroad and combat communism in the arena of the student conferences. There was, apparently, nothing illegal or irregular about it. The step was judged to be in the national interest and it was taken. At the time it was felt that for the United States to subsidize the students openly would have made them appear to be U.S. agents and thus much less effective.

The fact there was no wrongdoing was suggested Wednesday in the remarks of McCarthy and Rep. Melvin R. Laird, R-Wis., chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee.

McCarthy said he did not necessarily "fault" the CIA, and Laird said: "I believe it is necessary for American students to be represented at international meetings. Communists are represented, and they are financed by their government. Never at any time were the positions taken (at the conferences) dictated by the government (CIA). But these programs should be run by the Office of Education. It was the manner of handling them and the announcement of the subsidy that were very unfortunate. I don't think it should have been secret."

The secret and clandestine nature of the arrangement is what causes the shock and criticism in this time long removed from the days of the Stalinist menace.

In the light of today's ethics it is widely regarded as wrong for scholars to accept CIA money in any form lest their motives be misunderstood by other scholars throughout the world. This is partly because the main function of the CIA is espionage, even though NSA was not expected, according to all accounts, to participate in espionage activity. Any link an American scholar has with a spying organization, however, jeopardizes his good relations with scholars in other countries, which is a serious matter for American education.

By today's standards it would be much more acceptable for government agencies to provide help publicly to send students abroad—especially agencies without the controversial aura of the CIA.

It seems one of the real slips the CIA made was in not grasping this change in attitude in time to end the arrangement with NSA before the word leaked out as it now has to the CIA's serious embarrassment.

The disclosure is already bringing calls for re-examination of the organization's functions and for closer scrutiny of the CIA by Congress.