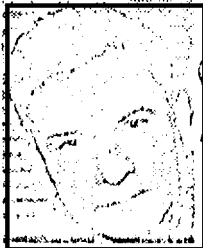


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CIA & AFL-CIO: The Bigger Story

JAMES A. WECHSLER

Victor Reuther read the disclosures of CIA's secret financial sponsorship of the National Student Assn. with vry interest.

"All I'll say now is that there is a lot bigger story in the CIA's financial and other connections with the AFL-CIO than with the students," he said over a telephone from Washington.

"I did my best to try to lift the lid on it. And some day it will all come out."

Reuther, director of international affairs for the Automobile Workers Union and brother of the embattled UAW leader, was reluctant to amplify his charges at this juncture because of the union's strained relations with the AFL-CIO council.

But he added he would "stand by everything I've said before" about the labor organization's involvement with CIA. He suggested that it was unfortunate and ironic that the storm had broken over NSA because he believes much of its work has been useful. He takes a dimmer view of the AFL-CIO's operations.

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For the AFL-CIO's top officialdom, the explosion over CIA comes at a painful moment because its executive council is meeting shortly in Miami and there will undoubtedly be press inquiries on the subject. But any major confrontation within the council is unlikely in the light of Walter Reuther's resignation from that body; there are no indications that any other leader of significant stature will ask embarrassing questions.

The questions, however, will persist and they will be especially awkward because too many men of labor privately know too much about the facts. Bland denials may become increasingly hazardous in the face of the Congressional curiosity that the student story has already stimulated.

Such an investigation, it can be flatly stated, would reveal that various international and Latin-American operations of the AFL-CIO have been heavily subsidized through CIA conduits.

It would also disclose at least one sensational case of quiet CIA intervention in an election in an AFL-CIO union. When the "CIA man" won, the union's staff and budget rose and its international activity suddenly increased in Latin America and the Middle East.

And finally an inquiry would show innumerable instances in which AFL-CIO agents collaborated with CIA's cloak-and-dagger men in an infinite variety of coups and undercover intrigues.

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The key figure in the AFL-CIO's underground ties to CIA is Jay Lovestone, sometimes known as George Meany's personal secretary of state. Lovestone, a Communist leader in the 1920s, has become in modern times a high-flying hawk whose views are often indistinguishable from Barry Goldwater's. Last June he told an interviewer that he favored a "more forceful" position on Vietnam than President Johnson's and he proclaimed "superior military strength and no appeasement" as his slogan.

Lovestone and Victor Reuther have frequently clashed, and last May Reuther first alred the charge of Lovestone's relations with CIA. He also observed that "the tragedy of AFL-CIO activities in the field of foreign affairs is that they are a vest-pocket operation by Jay Lovestone."

Lovestone, a 66-year-old, high-spirited veteran of many public and clandestine wars, has always blandly denied any close ties to CIA. But few sophisticated laborites have doubted the intimacy.

Whatever the extent of CIA's financial support for Lovestone's many maneuvers, the uncontestable fact is that he has continued to receive a blank check from AFL-CIO leadership.

Not until long afterward did it become known that one of Lovestone's "institutes" actively helped to train Brazilian unionists here to participate in the military coup against Goulart's Brazilian regime (only to discover two years later that an alleged leftist but constitutional government had been replaced by an oppressive tyranny of the right).

The record, of course, is not wholly negative; during the Marshall Plan era Lovestone and his associates played an affirmative role in strengthening democratic unionism; it is only in recent years, amid the turmoil in the Communist world and the shifts in many camps, that Lovestone's rigidities have rendered the AFL-CIO's posture so grotesque.

But the issue of the AFL-CIO's relations with CIA transcends the merits of specific policy disputes between Lovestone and Victor Reuther. It has been the traditional boast of AFL-CIO spokesmen at international congresses that they speak as free men against the government-controlled unions of totalitarian nations. How free are men who accept government subsidies directly or indirectly, and who work hand-in-hand with an intelligence network that has become a state within a state?

The damage now suffered by the National Student Assn. is incalculable. But there will be far larger world repercussions if the AFL-CIO's chief foreign-policy operatives are revealed to have been subsidized partners in CIA's games, and if the CIA is even shown to have taken a hand in internal union conflicts here.

To paraphrase an old remark, it is a misfortune when secret agents blunder; it is inexcusable when they get caught. That is what has begun to happen to CIA, and many institutions bigger than the student groups—including the AFL-CIO—may be scarred by the fall-out.

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