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PROGRAM Metromedia News STATION WTTG TV
DATE June 23, 1982 10:00 PM CITY Washington, DC
SUBJECT Protection for CIA Agents

GLORIA GIBSON: The Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia opened its gates today for a rare public glimpse inside. Among those there, President Reagan. He was there to sign a bill offering some protection to American CIA agents.

Metromedia 5's Barry Cunningham reports.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM: American spy masters, past and present, gathered at the Central Intelligence Agency. While inside the headquarters building, President Reagan delivered a special message of thanks to several hundred top secret agents. The spies were kept hidden to protect their identities from television cameras. It was to protect covert agents from exposure in printed publications that the President came to the CIA.

Several hundred intelligence employees in less sensitive jobs were permitted to be seen on the grounds of Langley, Virginia as the President defended the agency against controversies of the past.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: You are the trip-wire across which the forces of repression and tyranny must stumble in their quest for global domination. You, the men and women of the CIA, are the eyes and ears of the free world. Like those who are part of any silent service, your sacrifices are sometimes unappreciated, your work is sometimes misunderstood.

CUNNINGHAM: The bill signed by the President makes it a federal crime, punishable up to ten years in prison, to disclose the name of any American spy.

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PRESIDENT REAGAN: It's law.

CUNNINGHAM: It's law, but defenders of the First Amendment say it's bad law. They plan to challenge in court one section that would punish journalists for divulging the names of agents from public documents. Civil libertarians say that chilling effect would have prevented the investigation of Watergate.

At CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, this is Barry Cunningham.