

P. McCoy, Harper & Row
SOC. 4.01.2 - Harper & Row
The Politics of
Heroin in SE Asia

Sparks or Sputters?

A Washington drawing room was the scene last year of an unlikely encounter between poet Allen Ginsberg and Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The subject of the post-poetry-reading confrontation was opium and Ginsberg insisted that the CIA was deeply involved in shipping it around Southeast Asia. So totally false did Helms consider the accusation that he agreed to a fascinating bet with the poet: Helms promised that he would sit down for an hour of meditation each day for the rest of his life if the charges were proved correct.

The same accusations—true or not—boiled again last week. This time, the

from guerrillas to government officials, are so deeply involved—the CIA not only overlooks their dealings, but sometimes even helps them transport opium and heroin. Soon afterward, the CIA's general counsel, Lawrence Houston, wrote to Harper & Row: "We believe we cannot stand by and see baseless criticism... without trying to set the record straight."

After considerable deliberation, Harper & Row sent the agency a set of galleys. Seven days later, the CIA weighed in with a lengthy critique—which Harper & Row editors judged rather light. Brooks Thomas, vice president and general counsel of the publishing house, then replied to Houston: "We believe the best service we can render the author, the CIA and the general public is to

up their own minds. "I had hoped that my work would be interesting enough to spark a public debate," he says. "Now the CIA, by attempting to suppress the book, has itself sparked the debate." Still, there is no indication that CIA director Helms has been convinced by the book's charges; he has not disclosed any plans to begin daily meditations.

CIA 1.01 Helms, Richard

CIA 4.01 Drug Traffic

CIA 4-Laos

CIA 1.03 Houston, Lawrence



John Everingham—DNSI



Robert R. McElroy—Newsweek

McCoy interviewing Laotians, and his provocative book

CIA, which almost never takes a public stand on any issue, clashed with the respected publishing firm of Harper & Row. At issue is a book—"The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia"—in which author Alfred W. McCoy presents a heavily documented argument that the CIA has assisted in the flow of opium and its by-product, heroin. The CIA challenged the book before publication, and Harper & Row reluctantly allowed the agency to peruse the galleys. Then, despite a list of objections specified by the CIA, Harper & Row announced that it was satisfied that the book was sound and would publish it this week—a month ahead of schedule.

McCoy, a 26-year-old Yale graduate student, first made his accusations during Congressional testimony in June. McCoy charged that because drug traffic is such a local custom in Asia—and U.S. allies,

publish the book as expeditiously as possible, and that is what we intend to do." Privately, the Harper & Row lawyer commented, "We were underwhelmed by their criticism."

Why did the CIA—usually the most silent of government agencies—take on Harper & Row so publicly? One agency insider observed that McCoy's charges had been made before—mostly in underground or fringe publications. "But what I think has got the backs up around here," he suggested, "is that the charges are now showing up in Harper's magazine and in a Harper & Row book. That is hitting where these people live," he said, gesturing around him at CIA headquarters. "These are people with vast contacts in the academic community and government. They can't let this ridiculous falsehood be accepted as fact."

McCoy is content to let readers make