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'To Call Us Terrorists Is a Dangerous Flimflam'

The Post's recent editorial ("The Philip Agees, the Louis Wolfs") is dizzying in its contradictions and shameful in its misrepresentations. As one of the targets of the so-called Intelligence Identities Protection Act, we feel we must respond.

We agree completely that the proposed legislation poses a dangerous threat to investigative journalism—indeed, to the First Amendment in general. But you must realize that your editorial concern is diluted, to say the least, when you call us "contemptible" and hope vainly—that the bill will "respect the rights of journalists and others whose good faith is not suspect." For one thing, we are journalists in the traditional sense, with good faith, just as much as your reporters are, and there is no way a law can distinguish between us. Your diatribe only highlights the gap between the editorial offices and the reporters, for your people are among the large number of working journalists from virtually all the major printed and electronic media in the country who call upon us daily for help, research, information and, of all things, names of intelligence operatives in connection with articles they are writing.

Moreover, the "protections" in the act are no protection at all. You must know that the CIA takes the position that any disclosures of any kind impede their activities. How could any journalist expose a major CIA operation—as The Post has done on several occasions—without wittingly understanding that the story would impede CIA activities? Whatever the language used, every version of the bill would allow the prosecution of, for example, The Washington Post and The New York Times for stories they run nearly every week.

But it is your personal attacks that are truly unjustifiable. To say we would consider it a "great victory" if First Amendment liberties were abridged in our name is mindless rhetoric based on an utter failure to understand who we are, what we do and why we do it. We are opposed to the CIA because we are against clandestine manipulation of the affairs of other countries, whether accomplished merely by bribery, corruption and extortion, or recruitment of local citizens to work for the CIA, or as a result of bombing, arson, paramilitary mercenary groups, torture training or assassination. Covert operations are the raison d'être of the CIA, and we oppose them. We have no quarrel with intelligence-gathering in the traditional sense—but that is not why the CIA has case officers and agents in every country in the world.

To call us "terrorists" is a dangerous flimflam. You may disagree with our contention that the United States—and especially the CIA—is responsible for more terrorism, more death and destruction, over the past several decades than any other single institution in the world, but you could not read our publications without knowing that we are opposed to violence and terrorism—and as American citizens fighting hard against that for which the CIA is responsible. Not one single person has been physically harmed on account of what we do, while the CIA has been responsible for literally millions of deaths—in Chile, in Indonesia, in Laos, in South Korea, in Guatemala, in Jamaica, to cite just a few examples.

It is sad that you think our purpose is to "destroy democracy," when the CIA represents the least democratic aspect of the entire U.S. government. It is editorials like yours that lend credence to the CIA's cause, and that will allow for the passage of this act and a significant blow against democracy.

The writers are co-editors of CovertAction Information Bulletin.