Old Spies and Cold Peas

By JEFF STEIN

A HUTCH OF RABBITS WAS MUSTERED FOR SECURITY duty in the kitchen of the Holiday Inn in McLean, Virginia, in early October, pretesting samples of fried chicken, roast beef, and cold peas as the Association of Former Intelligence Officers sat down for a luncheon at its fifth annual convention. It wouldn't do to have America's finest ex-spies knocked off in one fell swoop by a KGB chef.

The association, founded in 1975 by senior CIA covert operator David Phillips (Cuba, 1960; Brazil, 1964; Chile, 1973), appears to be having a vintage year after five years of sour grapes. Membership has increased tenfold from an original 250 to 2600 former CIA, FBI, and military intelligence agents and officers, and this year, for the first time, corporate membership has been solicited and enthusiastically received ($500 a year gets a company three free memberships). Lockheed was first in line.

A marked departure from earlier years, when the more prominent brethren were busy ducking subpoenas or television network crews, the mood at this year's convention was both joyous and combative, apparently thanks to the bracing Cold War tingle in the air and the solid prospects for new laws making it a crime to disclose the name of a CIA officer learned from publicly available sources.

This year's convention of spies found cause for joy in every corner. Key "anti-CIA" liberals Frank Church, George McGovern, Birch Bayh, and John Culver were in deep trouble in their reelection bids (and went on to lose). The Supreme Court had grabbed Frank Snepp's "ill-gotten gains" from *Decent Interval* back for the government. The Congress had repealed the Clark Amendment prohibiting covert intervention in Africa on the side of apartheid and had retreated from its early promise to write a strong CIA and FBI charter. As former CIA intelligence chief and present Reagan adviser Ray Cline crowed to the assembled CIA, FBI, and military men, "We are on the upgrade at last."

Or are they? A few days of milling around at the conference, dipping into panel discussions and chatting with a number of intelligence officers in the lobby or bar, suggests that the U.S. intelligence community remains mired in delusions about itself and the world about it. Its chronic and crippling problem remains its inability to distinguish between intervention and intelligence, security and repression. In the real world, moreover, its solution to these problems is not as harmless as hiring rabbits to pretest food for a convention banquet.

A series of sharp exchanges at the conference is instructive. On Friday, October 3, a panel on Soviet Bloc intelligence operations unveiled its star performer, the former chief of "disinformation" for Czech intelligence, Ladislav Bittman. Chaired by Ray Cline, the panel sought to draw out of Bittman a pattern of omnipotent KGB and Eastern Bloc efforts to recruit Western journalists and plant false information in the press.

The issue is important. In recent months, the devil theory of international relations has made a big comeback. The Soviet Union is said to be not merely throwing its weight around and protecting its vital interests, like any other great power; it is evil unto itself. A corollary to this grand design is the apparently fashionable view that Russian "moles" have burrowed into the loose fabric of American life, poking, climbing, and chewing their way into the highest echelons of the U.S. press and the intelligence community itself. Thus, an editorialist's support for human rights cannot merely be a sensitive response to much of the world's state-organized cruelty; it has to be "proof" of seduction by Soviet intelligence's "false flag" technique of wooing liberals to communist aims.

Czech defector Bittman, with Leninesque goatee and speaking in "Mission: Impossible" Eastern European accents, played the role assigned to him in the panel discussion. He titillated this special audience, producing chuckles when

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