

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 494

THE NATION
26 April 1980

C.I.A. Secret Missionaries

Until 1975, the Central Intelligence Agency routinely used missionaries and clerics as informants and for covert activities. This was particularly true in Latin America, where most of the fourteen documented cases of collaboration with the C.I.A. occurred.

Now, under foreign intelligence charter legislation being considered by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the C.I.A. would again be empowered to use church groups to gather intelligence. White House spokesmen claim that the C.I.A. would enlist missionaries only if "it is terribly important." They also state that the Government will support a charter to "protect the integrity" of missionaries and clerics. On the basis of the C.I.A.'s past record, however, such assurances are dubious—as is shown by the following passage excerpted from Penny Lernoux's Cry of the People, to be published by Doubleday on May 2.

—The Editors

PENNY LERNOUX

Adolfo Centeno Alancastro was suitably sympathetic. It really was a shame, he told the Uruguayan Jesuit, how brutish Uruguayan police agents were, but what could you do with people who thought that Medellín* was the name of a person and confused pictures of Christ with Che Guevara.

The police had just ransacked the priest's house in Montevideo, carrying off his entire library to burn, including a rare collection of theological treatises, and here was their boss commiserating with him over the loss of his life's work! According to Centeno, such incidents would never happen if Church officials would only cooperate with educated policemen like himself.

Whatever his claims, Centeno had bona fide credentials,

for, like his colleagues, to illustrate an intimacy of politics, as well as a courtesy of the local and foreign C.I.A. now an area, partly by Catholic and following revolutionary groups in security agencies. For example, was the

Uruguayan interior ministry, Luis Vargas Garmendia, was an old C.I.A. hand who had worked with former C.I.A. agent Philip Agee in the 1960s. The pair spent their time making life difficult for diplomats from the socialist countries accredited to Uruguay back in the days when Uruguay was still a democracy. Vargas Garmendia was generally thought to have planned the murders of two former Uruguayan Senators in Buenos Aires in 1976. He was later made secretary to President Aparicio Méndez, front man for Uruguay's repressive military regime.

Because of his background in Church affairs, acquired during a stint in Central America, Centeno was chosen to monitor and persecute Uruguay's critical Catholic Church. Also useful were his credentials as a militant in Catholic Action, a laymen's movement that was influential in Latin America during the 1960s. Centeno professed not to understand why Uruguayan priests were so "strangely" reluctant to answer questions, whereas his experience with Catholics in Central America had been "just the opposite." But in view of the regime's arrest and/or expulsion of fifteen religious between 1972 and 1976, the closure of five Church publications and a smear campaign against Montevideo's Archbishop Carlos Parteli, labeled a Communist because he defended human rights, such reticence was well-founded. Though an "educated" policeman, Centeno specialized in the "black propaganda" of half-truths or outright lies practiced by the C.I.A. in its work with Church groups in Ecuador, Brazil and Chile during the 1960s and early 1970s. When such important Montevideo bookstores as Ramos y Mosca refused to stock *The Church of Silence*, a slanderous attack on Chile's bishops by a right-wing Catholic group known as Tradition, Family, and Property (T.F.P.), Centeno threatened the owners.

Men like Centeno owe their skills in part to the Agency for International Development's police training programs, but they also adhere to a long tradition of Church spying that dates to the C.I.A.'s forerunner, the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.), formed during World War II. Later, during the cold war, U.S. missionaries routinely collaborated with the C.I.A. and, on their return to the United States, visited the State Department to be debriefed. In those days there was nothing conspiratorial about this relationship, nor any suggestion of moral conflict: most missionaries shared