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CIA Protection Bill Would Hide Public Info, Editor Says

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SAN FRANCISCO — When you meet Lou Wolf, co-editor of the Washington D.C.-based magazine Covert Action Information Bulletin, it's hard to identify this scholarly and reasonable sounding man as the one who has thrown the United States intelligence community into a turmoil, or as the man who has become a favorite target of angry denunciations in the halls of Congress.

Wolf sprang to national attention in 1978 when his magazine began publishing the names and assignments of hundreds of CIA operatives. The articles were based on information available to anyone who wanted to take the trouble to sort through public documents in the Library of Congress. He also edited two massive volumes documenting CIA activity in Europe and Africa, called "Dirty Tricks" 1 and 2.

Wolf is traveling the country trying to alert people "who care about the First Amendment" to the dangers of a new bill authored by Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-

Mass., that's now before the Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism and Security.

The Intelligence Identities Protection Act, as it is known, would make Wolf or any other journalist liable to fines and jail sentences for revealing the names of any intelligence agent who works for the government, even if the information comes from public documents.

Wolf was in the Bay Area recently speaking to newspaper groups on the proposed legislation.

"If such a law had been passed in 1972, Americans would never have known about Watergate. Woodward and Bernstein could have gone to jail for revealing the identities of Howard Hunt and the Cubans he hired to break into the Watergate apartments because they were CIA employees. Think about that for a minute," Wolf said.

"The Contra Costa Times and the New York Times would be vulnerable to criminal prosecution if this bill passes. The Washington Post printed a story about CIA payments to the King of Jordan

last year. They might be prosecuted for such a story under this law."

Wolf said many Americans have the impression that the CIA only gathers intelligence, but he said its major activity is intervention into the internal affairs of other countries which is outside the agency's legal mandate.

In a well-publicized incident, members of the Covert Action staff traveled to Kingston, Jamaica, in 1980 to monitor CIA activities on the island.

"When we got there, we found out the CIA had 15 agents on this little island and we got very curious. Jamaica had a democratically elected, socialist president named Michael Manley who was similar in his political approach to Salvadore Allende in Chile.

"We found out CIA agents were trying to destabilize Jamaica the same way they did it in Chile, to get rid of Manley. So we had a press conference and named the agents. Days later it was reported that one of the agent's houses was fired on," said Wolf. "Most Jamaican journalists knew who all the agents were before we ever got to the island."

Various government officials and congressmen who are sympathetic to the CIA and other American intelligence agencies have used that incident, among others, to claim that the work of journalists like Wolf is a threat to America's national security.

Covert Action Information Bulletin and other magazines and newspapers have published the names of more than 2,000 CIA operatives over the last five years, according to Wolf, and "very few of them have

been moved from their posts, which leads us to believe the CIA does not really fear for their safety. They just want to silence us," he said.

Covert Action Information Bulletin, which comes out six or seven times a year, will continue to publish names, Wolf said, "because we believe the CIA must be held accountable for what their employees do just like you and I must be held accountable for what we do. The CIA should not be above the law."

Wolf says the wording of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act is so vague that it would also protect agents working for the FBI and those of 16 other government agencies.

"It is possible that if you found an agent planted in your school, union or church group, and you exposed his or her identity, you could be prosecuted under this proposed law and the penalties include fines and jail sentences," Wolf said.