

# Colby Nostalgically Recalls Days Without Testimony

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Careful to maintain his cool facade, CIA Director William E. Colby cheerfully answered the questions posed by the man with the day-old beard and the open sport shirt.

No, he was saying in effect, the CIA is not engaged in a conspiracy with multinational corporations.

The exchange between Colby and the inquisitive man took place during a recess in Colby's testimony to a public meeting of a House subcommittee last week. It passed virtually unnoticed although it was symbolic of an almost revolutionary change within the nation's intelligence community.

It is impossible to conjure up a picture of Allen Dulles, the super spy of the Cold War years, rapping with whoever wanted to get his ear. It is almost as difficult to picture Dulles — or most of his successors — testifying in public to a congressional committee.

**BUT TIMES ARE** changing.

Although he admits he isn't very happy about it, Colby has been forced to change the focus of his job. He spends more time on public relations these days than he does on intelligence-gathering.

During another recess of the House hearing, Colby told reporters that he devotes between 60 and 80 percent of his time to defending the CIA in talks to congressional committees or public forums.

In the earlier days of the 28-year history of the CIA, people just didn't talk about it. Members of Congress didn't want to know what the agency was doing and

most of the public was awed.

Colby talks about that period with a trace of nostalgia.

"IN 1947, WHEN the CIA was established, it was responsive to American opinion which accepted the old tradition that nations conduct but do not talk about intelligence," he told the House subcommittee headed by Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y.

"External supervision in those years was sporadic and sympathetic in tune with the consensus on foreign policy which marked the times," he said.

By now, almost everyone knows that as a result of that anything-goes attitude, the CIA broke the law. The staunchly establishment Rockefeller Commission said that some CIA activities were "plainly unlawful and constituted improper invasions upon the rights of Americans."

Colby concedes that laws were broken. His objective is to convince the public that the breaches were trivial in comparison to the value of the agency to the nation.

Colby seems well-suited to the task. A medium-sized and middle-aged man who wears glasses with flesh-colored plastic frames, Colby seems most notable for his unflappable self-control. The casual observer would take him for a bureaucrat — which, of course, he is — rather than a professional spy — which, despite appearances, he also is.

He does not look dangerous. It is easy to believe him when he says that the abuses spotlighted by the Rockefeller Commission

have been corrected and will not happen again.

**BUT SOME** CIA critics are urging Congress and the public to look carefully at Colby's reassurances. These critics say Colby answers only the question he is asked, volunteering nothing more. These responses can be misleading unless the questioner knows just what to ask.

Members of the Abzug committee complained frequently during their most recent hearing that Colby's answers given at an earlier session in March were wide of the mark. The director contended that he had said nothing untruthful in March.

For example: At the earlier hearing, Colby described in general terms some of the events which the Rockefeller Commission identified as Operation Chaos. As part of that discussion he was asked how many members of Congress were subjects of CIA files. He said four.

In his appearance last week, Colby said the CIA has files on about 75 members of Congress. Committee members demanded to know how the list had grown so fast in such a short time. Colby explained the number collected as part of Operation Chaos was still four. The other 71 or so lawmakers were included in other parts of the agency's file system.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with a person choosing his words with care and saying no more than necessary. But if Congress is determined to reverse 28 years of "I-don't-want-to-know-about-it" philosophy and learn just what the CIA is doing, the lawmakers will have to spend more time on their homework.

**THE TASK** of overseeing the CIA is made many times more difficult by the complex bureaucratic structure of the agency. Few people outside "the company" have anything more than the vaguest idea of its organizational chart.

For instance, the CIA has between 45 and 50 separate filing systems. A question about files could be answered for one system, leaving out 44 to 49 others.

The CIA has several overlapping and interlocking directorates and components. In theory, at least, one segment of the agency may have ended a controversial practice while another segment is still engaging in it.

Once during his appearance before the Abzug committee, Colby gave an indication of the precision with which he uses the language. When a questioner asked about interception of microwave telephone transmissions and referred to it as a "telephone tap," Colby replied, "That was not a telephone tap — it was an interception of conversation by a mechanical means but it was not a telephone tap."