

WASHINGTON POST

6 MAY 1976

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Professors Decry Recruiting by CIA

By Noel Epstein

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A leading organization of college and university professors urged the Central Intelligence Agency yesterday to stop recruiting academics for covert activities that "betray their professional trust."

The step by the American Association of University Professors reflects its distress over Senate intelligence committee disclosures that "several hundred" academics are engaged in clandestine CIA work.

In a letter to CIA Director George Bush, William W. Van Alstyne, president of the 75,000-member group, said, "A government which corrupts its colleges and universities by making political fronts of them has betrayed academic freedom and compromised all who teach."

In an interview, Van Alstyne, who is a Duke University law professor, acknowledged that the blame also lies with academics who agree to become clandestine CIA operatives.

"The CIA is the briber and the academic is the bribe—we're asking the briber to cut it out," he said, adding that he soon may admonish the campus community in the association's newspaper.

He also said that if "an institution can show us that a person is guilty of such a serious abuse of professional standards, then we think the institution is right" if it fires the professor. The AAUP is a union as well as a professional association.

The Senate committee did not make public the names of the academics involved in covert CIA activities.

Van Alstyne made clear

that the AAUP is not objecting to all CIA involvement with professors, only that which it believes compromises academic integrity.

This area might include cases, he said, in which professors knowingly do research under CIA sponsorship but fail to disclose this funding; misrepresent sheer propaganda efforts as scholarship or abuse students' and colleagues' confidences by passing them on to the intelligence agency.

The association is not necessarily opposed to instances where "faculty members return from foreign conferences and someone in the CIA asks them what they saw or did," Van Alstyne remarked. "That is not covert and not necessarily improper."

According to the Senate committee, most of the CIA's "many thousands" of academic contacts have been of this nature, and the panel did not view these as imperiling academic integrity.

In his letter to Bush, Van Alstyne noted that the CIA director has agreed to stop employing missionaries and "accredited" journalists for covert operations and urged the same treatment for professors.