

Central Intelligence Agency

By Bill Hobby

The shocking news that a college president in Rochester, NY, has worked for the CIA has started the latest wave of controversy over "political correctness" on the nation's university campuses.

Apparently co-operating with your government gets you in a world of trouble in some places. So, as a college professor, I had better confess that I, too, have been guilty of the same sin.

But it's worse than that. My wife, Diana, actually worked for the Agency for two years. We have talked this over and decided that, before the "thought police" get here, we had better make a clean breast of the whole matter.

So here it goes. I'll start at the very beginning.

Diana and I first met each other through LtJG Donald Morris, USN. Donald and I were in Naval Intelligence at the time. He later went to work for the CIA. His job was giving grief to Soviet (KGB) agents in Paris, Berlin, Kinshasha, and Saigon.

He baby-sat KGB defectors in Washington and thereabouts.

When Donald retired from the Agency, he took up an even more disreputable trade: he became a newspaper columnist.

But our crimes are more than just guilt by association. We were actually personally involved in trying to help our country.

I plead guilty to having helped channel Agency funds to provide scholarships so that Third World, mostly African, students could go to a journalism school in West Berlin in 1963. What was the American interest in that?

What better way to show a student from an uncommitted nation the difference between Communism and Capitalism than to see first-hand the difference between East Berlin and West Berlin?

Like many offenders against political correctness, I hoped my deeds would go undetected. But it was not to be.

My sins were exposed and documented by Senator Frank Church of Idaho in 1967. Senator Church held hearings that exposed many U.S. intelligence operations, making public disclosures that will harm this country for years to come.

As a result of those hearings, other Western intelligence services understandably refused to share information or sources with us. One United States Senator single-handedly did more to damage our ability to know our enemy than the KGB ever did.

The tale of my politically incorrect errand-running for CIA doesn't end with the role of conduit for CIA money. I was in Moscow with an American group in 1959. We stayed at the Roosia Hotel, a 2,000-room horror that was still under construction.

The hotel was so new that our folks in Washington didn't yet know which rooms were bugged. So I dutifully reported the numbers of the rooms in which our group stayed. Big-time stuff.

But the worst is yet to come. In 1965, President Johnson chewed out Admiral William F. Raborn, then Director of Central Intelligence.

In an effort better to understand his demanding superior, Admiral Raborn asked the CIA librarian to get some books about the Texas Hill Country, which did so much to shape Johnson's philosophy.

The librarian called bookstores in Austin and Houston and explained the kind of books he needed and why. Not surprisingly, the incident made for an amusing story on page one of the Washington Post a few days later.

The CIA wanted to find out if the story had come from within their shop or from the overly candid calls the librarian had made. They asked me if I could find out. I said I would try.

So I called Larry (Lonesome Dove) McMurtry, who was then teaching at Rice and running the Houston bookstore the Post had mentioned. I asked Larry to help me pick out a book for Diana's forthcoming birthday.

He chose a \$14 first edition of poetry by William Butler Yeats. I thanked him and then asked him about the Washington Post story. He laughed and said he had told the Washington Post's Houston correspondent about the CIA call.

Then I went outside where the CIA people were waiting and set their minds at ease. The next day they presented me with a check for \$14 which they insisted I accept. Diana was one of the few people that year whose birthday present was picked out by Larry McMurtry and paid for by the CIA.

Heavy-duty stuff.

So much for my James Bond adventures. What did Diana, an editor by trade, do for the spooks? She and some other ex-English teachers and newspaper types translated the stuff CIA economists wrote into English so ordinary folks could understand it.

She has a similar, but even tougher job these days: editing this column.

Written in 1991.