

CIA Manipulation: The Painful Truths Told by Phil Agee

By [William Blum](#)

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Truly objective journalism would value facts and accuracy above all else, but the mainstream U.S. press – while pretending to be “objective” – treasures faux patriotism much more, as is evident with recent whistleblowers as it was with the hostility toward the late Phil Agee who exposed CIA crimes.

Before there was Edward Snowden, William Binney and Thomas Drake ... before there was Bradley Manning, Sibel Edmonds and Jesselyn Radack ... there was Philip Agee. What Agee revealed is still the most startling and important information about U.S. foreign policy that any American government whistleblower has ever revealed.

Philip Agee spent 12 years (1957-69) as a CIA case officer, most of it in Latin America. His first book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, published in 1974 – a pioneering work on the Agency’s methods and their devastating consequences – appeared in about 30 languages around the world and was a best seller in many countries; it included a 23-page appendix with the names of hundreds of undercover Agency operatives and organizations.



Photo: Philip Agee, the CIA officer who blew the whistle on U.S. intelligence abuses in Latin America and elsewhere.

Under CIA manipulation, direction and, usually, their payroll, were past and present presidents of Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay and Costa Rica, “our minister of labor”, “our vice-president”, “my police”, journalists, labor leaders, student leaders, diplomats, and many others. If the Agency wished to disseminate anti-communist propaganda, cause dissension in leftist ranks, or have Communist embassy personnel expelled, it need only prepare some phony documents, present them to the appropriate government ministers and journalists, and – presto! – instant scandal.

Agee’s goal in naming all these individuals, quite simply, was to make it as difficult as he could for the CIA to continue doing its dirty work.

A common Agency tactic was writing editorials and phony news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of the CIA authorship or CIA payment to the media. The propaganda value of such a “news” item might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans.

Wooing the working class came in for special treatment. Labor organizations by the dozen, sometimes hardly more than names on stationery, were created, altered, combined, liquidated, and new ones created again, in an almost frenzied attempt to find the right combination to compete with existing left-oriented unions and take national leadership away from them.

In 1975 these revelations were new and shocking; for many readers it was the first hint that American foreign policy was not quite what their high-school textbooks had told them nor what the *New York Times* had reported.

“As complete an account of spy work as is likely to be published anywhere, an authentic account of how an ordinary American or British ‘case officer’ operates ... All of it ... presented with deadly accuracy,” wrote Miles Copeland, a former CIA station chief and ardent foe of Agee. (There’s no former CIA officer more hated by members of the intelligence establishment than Agee; no one’s even close; due in part to his traveling to Cuba and having long-term contact with Cuban intelligence.)

In contrast to Agee, WikiLeaks withheld the names of hundreds of informants from the nearly 400,000 Iraq war documents it released.

In 1969, Agee resigned from the CIA (and colleagues who “long ago ceased to believe in what they are doing”).

While on the run from the CIA as he was writing *Inside the Company* – at times literally running for his life – Agee was expelled from, or refused admittance to, Italy, Britain, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. (West Germany eventually gave him asylum because his wife was a leading ballerina in the country.)

Agee’s account of his period on the run can be found detailed in his book *On the Run* (1987). It’s an exciting read.

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower; West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire. Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org. This article was originally published in Blum’s Anti-Empire Report.

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