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Back Out in the Cold

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By his own account, Philip Agee is no stranger to dirty tricks. The author of a 1975 book about the Central Intelligence Agency's clandestine Latin American activities, ex-agent Agee freely admitted his own role in bugging a foreign embassy and planting phony incriminating evidence on a leftist politician who was in disfavor with the CIA. Last week Agee, a resident of Britain for the past four years, claimed that he personally was the target of spookdom's latest dirty trick. Scotland Yard detectives knocked on the door of his Cambridge home and served him with a deportation letter. The charge: consorting with foreign intelligence services and disseminating information harmful to British security.

More surprising, the government at the same time issued a deportation letter against a U.S.-born Fleet Street journalist, Mark Hosenball, who had frequently used Agee as a source of information. Scotland Yard did not detail the charges against Hosenball other than to assert that he had "sought information for publication which would be harmful to state security."

Though the Home Office strongly denied that it had acted under U.S. pressure, the connection was clear enough on Fleet Street, where Agee has long been a ready source of statements critical of the CIA. He promptly charged that the CIA had pressed for his expulsion, claiming that the agency wants to disrupt his current project: a second volume of revelations about his former employer.

Hosenball pronounced himself altogether puzzled by the government's action. He has been a staffer on the respected Evening Standard for five months, covering routine local fare. But for three years before that, he worked for London's Time Out, a weekly counterculture magazine, and developed a reputation as an effective anti-Establishment reporter. In 1975, for instance, Hosenball published the names and described the activities of CIA employees in Britain. On the basis of that work, the Washington Post used Hosenball as a legman on a separate CIA story.

Deportation Letters. Britain's journalists, both foreign and local, were troubled by the precedent set by the deportation letters. In pursuit of stories, many newsmen had dealt with Agee as well as other sources with questionable motives. But the deportations seemed to indicate that the government, not journalists, would decide which sources are proper. The Evening Standard editorialized, "It is true that there may be people in journalism, as in politics, whose work is directed against the country's security and wellbeing. But there is no evidence that Mark Hosenball is one of them." Said Hosenball: "During all the time I was at Time Out, the government never complained to me once about what I was writing. So why are they doing this now?"

Several Labor M.P.s have demanded that the charges against Hosenball be aired publicly, but the government motives may never be known. Because the case involves state security, appeal rights are highly limited and the government has no legal obligation to make its reasons public.

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<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914734,00.html>