



Extrait du Le Journal des Alternatives

<http://journal.alternatives.ca/spip.php?article3458>

Obituary: Philip Agee

The CIA Man With a Difference

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Date de mise en ligne : Friday 15 February 2008

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Philip Agee, a CIA agent who went on to expose the CIA's dirty deeds, passed away on 7 January in Havana. He was 72. Agee succumbed to a surgery for a perforated ulcer, in a hospital where he was admitted on 25 December last, according to his widow, Gisella Roberge. Granma, Leftwing daily of Cuba, described him as a 'loyal friend of Cuba and staunch supporter of the peoples' struggle for a better world'.

Born in Florida on 19 July 1935 in a well-to-do family, Agee worked for the CIA in Latin American and other countries. Moved by his conscience, he left the CIA, and to make amends, he published *Inside The Company: CIA Diary* in 1975, naming dozens of under-cover agents. This damning expose of the CIA's inner world was translated into 29 languages and was handy for anti-imperialists all over the globe. It was first brought out in Cuba. In an interview to *Guardian of London* last year, Agee said, "It was a time in the 1970s when the worst imaginable horrors were going on in Latin America - Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guatemala, El Salvador - they were under military dictatorships with death squads, all with the backing of CIA and the US government".

Agee had joined the CIA in 1957. Working as a case officer in several Latin American countries, Agee's personal convictions began to waver in Uruguay in 1965 when Lyndon Johnson sent U.S. forces into the Dominican Republic. The revolution was put down, Agee argues, "not because it was Communist but because it was nationalist." (

He described his gradual realization, "My eyes began to open little by little down there as I began to realize more and more that all of the things that I, and my colleagues were doing in the CIA had one goal, that was that we were supporting the traditional power structures in Latin America. These power structures had been in place for centuries, wherein a relative few families were able to control the wealth and income and power of the state and the economy, to the exclusion of the majority of the population in many countries. The only glue that kept this system together was political repression. I was involved in this. Eventually I decided I didn't want anything more to do with that." (

He found it impossible to carry on espionage, under the CIA and put in his papers in 1969. As soon as his plans for a book were known, he began getting death threats from the CIA. He was first debarred from publishing his recollections. CIA's head of the western hemisphere division, Edward Shackley, was assigned the task of stopping the book from being in print. Agee moved to Cuba and got it published. He moved to London from Havana and began staying there with his partner Angela, a Brazilian Leftist, who too was jailed and tortured in her own country. Zealously committed to expose the US imperialism by unmasking the real face of the CIA, in 1978 Agee got around him a small group of strong sympathizers to publish "a worldwide campaign to destabilize the CIA through exposure of its operations and its personnel". The same year, he began co-editing *Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe* with Louis Wolf. This had infuriated Washington. Henry Kissinger urged the British Premier James Callaghan to deport him. Agee was accused of having helped the socialist leader Michael Manley - through his exposure of CIA - get elected as the Prime Minister of Jamaica.

Agee was deported and falsely accused of being responsible for the death of CIA chief in Athens, Richard Welch. But he could not be executed, despite best efforts by the CIA, and spent his life forced to move from country to country. He went to France but was refused political asylum, the same in the Netherlands. In 1980 he got the citizenship by the Government of Grenada when Maurice Bishop was elected. But this was also short-lived as Bishop was overthrown and killed by the US Army in 1983. He left Grenada for Nicaragua during the Sandinista regime which granted him citizenship. Ultimately he went to settle in Cuba, although he lived in Hamburg too. He described this life on the run in his autobiography, *On the Run*. (

The CIA Man With a Difference

Agee's greatest contribution was his deep insight and conviction that the dirty role of the CIA was not something that mere reforms within the system would correct; but that it was an inevitable corollary of capitalism: "Reforms of the FBI and the CIA, even removal of the President from office, cannot remove the problem. American capitalism, based as it is on exploitation of the poor, with its fundamental motivation in personal greed, simply cannot survive without force - without a secret police force."