

EXCURSUS IV

Mark Bruzonsky on
The CIA and the Power Peddlers
on Capitol Hill

During the Ninety-fourth Congress both Houses passed cautious measures to strengthen regulations on the lobbying of Congress. But the Congress adjourned last year without passing the House-Senate compromise legislation.

This reform effort predates the shocking revelations about South Korean meddling with the Congress—a scandal that may soon re-erupt with a series of unprecedented indictments on Capitol Hill. But corruption of this kind is the exception in our system. More common is the establishment of personal relationships, the provision of slanted information, and “fact-finding” “freebie” junkets. Representatives of special interests cultivate powerful congressional figures and their aides and provide “help” with subtle (and legal) methods of influencing policy.

When it comes to foreign affairs, as authors Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott reveal in their recent highly controversial study *The Power Peddlers* (Doubleday), the “Justice Department experts...estimate that over one hundred million dollars...are spent each year by foreign governments and corporations on shaping U.S. foreign policy and influencing policymakers....” Still, this figure does not include monies spent by some of the most important and successful foreign affairs lobbyists in Washington—for instance, Elias Demetracopoulos, a former Greek journalist who operates independently out of Washington’s Fairfax Hotel near Embassy Row, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which is a domestic lobby representing Americans supporting a strong bond between Israel and the United States.

Though at times somewhat tedious, the Howe-Trott book is both timely and fascinating. The overall conclusion that, “In the shadowy corridors of power of Washington, the predominant requirement is for the fullest possible disclosure,” is widely shared.

Still, there is danger in the antilobbying and antilobbyist attitude consistently expressed by Howe and Trott; a danger that becomes very clear in Robert Sherrill’s review of their book. On the basis of his reading of *The Power Peddlers*, and a second book dealing with the history of the “China lobby” (Taiwan, that is, during the 1950’s and 1960’s), Sherrill writes in the *New York Times Book Review* that it is time “to think more kindly of proposals to outlaw foreign lobbying.” This overreaction, which fails to understand how integral a part of our political system lobbying on foreign affairs issues has become and how deeply intertwined is this process with First Amendment freedoms, is precisely what must be guarded against.

Howe and Trott take a far from impartial attitude toward foreign lobbies, and they fail to distinguish sufficiently between real foreign lobbies and those broad-based domestic lobbies whose interests largely coincide with those of a foreign country such as Israel. Nevertheless, the overall conclusion—“Certainly foreign lobbies have never been so im- pertinently powerful, so arrogant or so blatant; the need to try to scale each lobby’s influence down...has never been so urgent as it is today”—is worth considering. And the authors’ proposed remedy of the “fullest possible disclosure” through tightly drafted legislation leads in the right direction.

The Power Peddlers, as an effort at investigative journalism, is increasingly being debated in the capital always sensitive to rumor and image. There are charges of factual errors, misleading statements, changed and even fabricated quotations and, most explosively, CIA involvement.

Senator Charles Percy (R-Ill.), for instance, denies ever calling Morris Amitay, the head of AIPAC a “little pipsqueak”—in fact, he denies ever meeting Amitay. Steve Bryan, on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, denies (in a letter to Doubleday) ever having taken a “freebie” trip. Numerous people have written to Doubleday to deny quotes and in some cases charge that the book is a deliberate “hatchet job,” especially in regard to Elias Demetracopoulos. Mr. Demetracopoulos believes the chapters concerning him represent another of a long string of CIA-State Department attempts at defamation. The Senate Intelligence Committee is now engaged in an investigation of this charge of CIA involvement against Demetracopoulos. And the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights may also look into these charges.

According to a letter from Senator McGovern (D-S.D.) to Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), “slandering raw material and disinformation from CIA operatives about Demetracopoulos was given to reporters and free lance writers like Russell Howe and Sarah Trott.” In a potentially damaging admission the Contracts Manager of the Publishing Division of Doubleday has written that Howe and Trott “have assured us that their source was a highly reliable government official and that the same and similar information had been provided by other CIA and government officials” (emphasis added).

Clearly stronger disclosure legislation is imperative to bring a little sunshine into this shadowy world of congressional lobbying. The Howe-Trott book may act as a stimulus, and it is unfortunate that the authors have left themselves so open to challenges on facts, quotations, and attitudes.

As for the alleged CIA connection, if there has been an attempt to influence the Congress and the public through the feeding of highly questionable information to journalists, then it would seem the CIA will have to be restricted further during the Jimmy Carter years. The irony, of course, is that in challenging Washington lobbyists, authors Howe and Trott may have been lobbied by the CIA themselves.

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