

Security Cases involving Character Weaknesses

The present policy governing cases which involve character weaknesses is based on Cabinet Directive No. 29 dated December 21st, 1955, which states that "persons who are unreliable from a security standpoint, not because they are disloyal, but because of defects in their character which may lead to indiscretion or dishonesty, or may make them likely subjects of blackmail, must not be employed in any position where they may have access to classified information. Such defects of character may also make them unsuitable for employment on grounds other than security."

2. The general practice has been to treat character defects, from a security point of view, in much the same way as subversive tendencies, associations or activities. Although there are valid reasons for arguing that persons with character weaknesses may be indiscreet or dishonest or susceptible to blackmail, it appears that it may now be possible to make some distinction between the kinds of weaknesses which could affect the reliability of an employee, and to modify the existing policy accordingly.

3. Since the formation of the Security Panel and the Security Sub-Panel, only one case has been brought to their attention which clearly indicated that a character weakness had rendered an employee untrustworthy for access to classified information. This was, of course, the case of James Stanley Staples, a civilian employee of the R.C.A.F. who, in 1956, was led on to pass certain low-grade information to a Soviet official, as a result of a series of social contacts which resulted in Staples drinking to excess.

4. While it is difficult, in the light of this case, to argue in favour of a change in security policy where drunkenness as a human weakness is involved, it may be possible to make some distinction in the application of the policy bearing in mind the type of employee involved. While certain persons do tend to talk more freely and to use less discretion when they are under the influence of alcohol, there does appear to be in mature and intelligent persons an innate sense of discretion which is retained even during drunkenness when the possibility arises of revealing information which the person is well aware should not be disclosed to unauthorized persons.

5. It is generally agreed that the problem of human weakness which most often arises has to do with homosexuality. The case of Burgess and Maclean in the United Kingdom immediately comes to mind, but it must be borne in mind here that so far as we are able to tell there is no evidence to suggest that the course of these men was in any way dictated by blackmail, and all the circumstances suggest that they were governed solely by ideological considerations.

6. In this connection, the Security Sub-Panel might be interested in a passage from an article by Hans J. Morgenthau, Director of the Center for the Study of American Foreign Policy at the University of Chicago. In the article, which appeared in the April 1955 issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, and is entitled "The Impact of the Loyalty-Security Measures on the State Department", Mr. Morgenthau said: "That the homosexual is peculiarly prone to commit crimes under the threat of blackmail is hardly doubted by anyone who faces the problem for the first time. Yet neither the histories of diplomacy and of treason nor the recollections of practitioners of diplomacy, insofar as I could ascertain, contain an instance of a homosexual having committed an act of treason under the threat of blackmail."

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7. Although drunkenness and sexual perversion are the two human weaknesses which are most commonly considered to bear upon an employee's reliability, consideration must also be given to the significance of other kinds of indiscretion as well as to an employee's record of honesty. Where a past criminal record is concerned, for example, there appears to be no alternative but to deal with each case on its merits and to arrive at a judgment based on all the pertinent information available. It is for the Security Sub-Panel to consider what guidance may be devised where cases in these categories are concerned.

8. It cannot reasonably be suggested that there is no security risk involved where character weaknesses are concerned; but it does seem that the evidence at hand would warrant the consideration of an alternate way of guarding against it which would be more sympathetic, frank and effective. For example, where there is evidence of character weakness, an employee, or prospective employee, might be taken, at least partially, into the confidence of the employing government department or agency. It might be indicated to him with the greatest possible tact that the department is aware, as a result of routine investigations, that he may have a character weakness which could affect his career. The employer could point out to him the possibility that he might be made the object of blackmail, and emphasize the duty to report any such approach with the assurance that he will receive the full cooperation of his employer and the security authorities.

9. There is no doubt that a policy such as this would raise many problems, particularly the protection of the sources of security information. It is suggested, however, that the nature of the information, and the sources of it, in cases involving character weaknesses, are not of the same degree of sensitivity as is the case where subversive activities or associations are

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concerned. If this is so, and since any statement made to the employee would be in the most general and tactful terms, then the danger of exposing delicate sources could be minimized. At the same time, the employing department would be in a much better position to assess any possible threat, as well as to withstand the criticisms of evasiveness and deception.

10. If a policy along these lines could be evolved, it is suggested that the end result - the protection of classified information and the security of the state - could be achieved at least as effectively as at present, and that there would be in addition desirable gains. These would include a reduction of the area in which government security policy is open to uninformed and unfair criticism by the public and, most important, a greater measure of fairness in the treatment of individuals whose loyalty is not in question.

12. In considering any change in emphasis which may be made in the present security policy where character weaknesses are concerned, the Sub-Panel may also wish to consider a re-wording of the present Cabinet Directive on security which might be recommended to Cabinet after consideration and approval by the Security Panel.

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