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AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

The House Inquiry Into CIA

THE HOUSE has untangled itself well from the mess it got in over the CIA, and it is now finally in a position to look into United States intelligence operations. The original select committee, led by Rep. Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.), has been abolished, and a new, larger committee has been constituted under Rep. Otis Pike (D-N.Y.), an independent-minded legislator who has won respect for previous investigations he has conducted. Rep. Pike intends to coordinate his new committee's work with that of the select Senate committee, which has been under way for several months.

Mr. Nedzi, chairman of the standing Armed Services CIA oversight committee, will not serve on the new panel. This is wise, since he has come to symbolize the kind of protective congressional patronage under which certain CIA improprieties and illegalities had thrived. Yet the particular sequence which fired up his critics showed something quite different from the laxity with which he was charged. In April 1974, Mr. Nedzi learned in a secret briefing that the CIA had been working covertly in Chile. His critics were outraged when they learned later that he had not shared that information; but Mr. Nedzi himself thought he discharged his proper duty of oversight by receiving the agency's assurances that such covert acts were no longer being practiced. It is true that public exposure may offer a better guarantee of rooting out operations like the "destabilization" of Chile than such private assurances do. But Mr. Nedzi had received no directive from his fellow congressmen to put the CIA out of the "dirty tricks" business. On the contrary, it was only when the CIA's domestic activities were exposed some months later that the Congress rose up and demanded a full dress review. He has been made scapegoat for the House's change of mind.

For Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.), it was not enough to learn, as he did by reading secret CIA testimony in June 1974, that the CIA had practiced subversion in Chile in the past. On the same day he heard officials publicly denying any CIA role in Chile. He

concluded that the truth had to come out. When his efforts to stir both congressional foreign affairs committees failed, he leaked the Chile information to the press. To lie about "dirty tricks" may be inescapable for a government that has decided to commit them: you can't have covert operations and overt reports about them. But when a critic appalled by "dirty tricks" hears officials lie about them he can be forgiven for interpreting this as a sign that the officials intend to commit "dirty tricks" again. So Mr. Harrington did what he felt he had to do, despite the pledge of confidentiality he had offered in order to obtain access to the Chile material.

A 16-13 Armed Services majority provisionally rebuked him last month for the leak, pending a formal ruling by the House Ethics Committee. But this was wrong. The Armed Services Committee should have understood that its own past protection of the CIA was responsible for creating the information clot which Mr. Harrington broke in the only way left to him. At a time when the House is seeking out new methods of oversight, it is silly to persecute a member for not upholding the old methods, especially when the House, by creating a select intelligence committee, has affirmed precisely the need for change to which that member had called its attention. It was unavoidable nonetheless that Mr. Harrington, like Mr. Nedzi, depart the select committee. He had come to symbolize complete defiance of the leading subject of the House inquiry, and no secure inquiry could go forward with him as a member of it, in the view of a House majority.

The House, by removing Mr. Nedzi and Mr. Harrington from the select committee, has thereby instructed it both to uncover the facts and to honor the terms on which information is provided it. This builds into the new committee the very tension which destroyed the old one. But the chastening experience of the Nedzi panel, the composition of the Pike committee and the personal reputation of Mr. Pike offer some hope that this tension can be successfully contained.