

INTELLIGENCE

The Directors Defend Themselves

Director William E. Colby admitted last week that the Central Intelligence Agency may have made "some missteps" in its 27-year history. Former Director James R. Schlesinger said that the agency had committed a "small number of misdemeanors," then corrected himself and called them "inappropriate actions." But no matter how cautiously Colby and Schlesinger chose their words, their meaning was clear: they were acknowledging that the CIA had spied for years on an undisclosed number of American dissidents within the U.S.

Theirs were the first official admissions that there was substance to the press allegations of CIA misconduct, and they came as both Congress and President Ford's blue-ribbon commission began separate investigations of the agency. Both Colby and Schlesinger tried to play down the extent of the CIA's domestic activities. Indeed, in a 45-page report to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Intelligence, Colby asserted that "any such missteps in CIA's history were few and far between" and never amounted to a "massive illegal domestic intelligence operation," as reported by the *New York Times*. He also insisted that the questionable actions ended after Schlesinger became CIA director in January 1973. Seven months later, Colby succeeded Schlesinger, who is now Secretary of Defense.

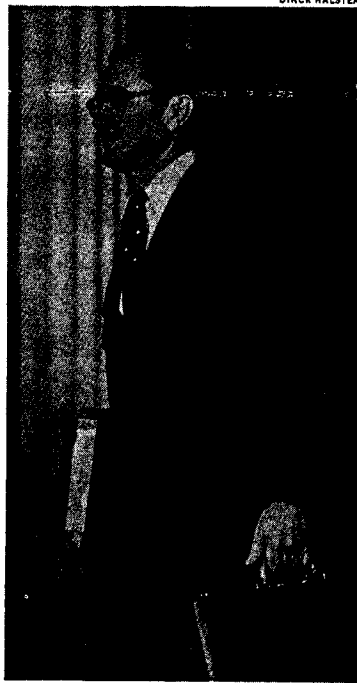
Some Connections. According to Colby, the CIA's possible "missteps" date from the 1950s but most occurred after President Lyndon Johnson became convinced in 1967 that U.S. black radicals and antiwar groups were receiving money and training from foreign anti-American groups. To investigate those supposed links and keep watch on U.S. dissidents during trips abroad, then CIA Director Richard Helms set up a special unit within the agency's Counter-Intelligence office. In a statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee last week, Helms asserted: "Information was indeed developed [that] the agitation here did in fact have some overseas connections."

According to Colby's report, the unit's investigation of dissidents led to domestic operations that may have skirted, if not violated, a charter provision specifying that the CIA "shall have no police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal-security functions" in the U.S. Colby's revelations:

► The CIA in 1967-68 planted ten undercover agents in dissident groups in the Washington, D.C., area to gather intelligence about "demonstrations, pickets, protests or break-ins" that might endanger CIA "personnel, facilities and information." By law, the CIA director can take steps to safeguard CIA oper-

ations and secrets, so up to a point that operation was defensible. But Colby said that the agents' reports were also "made available to the FBI, Secret Service and local police departments." By those actions, the CIA perhaps crossed the boundary of its charter.

► From 1970 to 1973, the CIA infiltrated "about a dozen" agents into U.S. "dissident circles" to provide the agents with cover for operating abroad. That again might be defensible, but Colby went on to say that "some of these individuals submitted reports on the activities of the American dissidents with



CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM COLBY
Skirting the charter.

whom they were in contact." Again, those actions would seem to violate the CIA charter.

► In the course of keeping watch on U.S. dissidents, the Counter-Intelligence unit established files on about 10,000 U.S. citizens, including a former Congressman. About two-thirds of the names came from the FBI, the remainder from leads developed by the CIA. Colby said that in recent months the CIA has weeded out about 1,000 of the files as "not justified by CIA's counter-intelligence responsibilities." But the inactive files "could be reconstituted should this be required."

The CIA sharply curtailed surveillance of U.S. dissidents last March, when Colby disbanded the special Counter-Intelligence unit and ordered that

the CIA watch Americans abroad only when asked to do so by the FBI. But there were dubious domestic actions by other divisions of the CIA that apparently had no connection with the surveillance of dissidents.

Colby said that the agency, quite apart from the Counter-Intelligence unit's list of 10,000, over the years has compiled lists of names of Americans for reasons "which do appear questionable under CIA's authority; for example, [as a result of] an excessive effort to identify possible 'threats' to the agency's security." Colby said that "a number of [the lists] have been eliminated in the past three years, and the agency's current directives clearly require that no such listings be maintained."

From 1953 until February 1973, according to Colby, the CIA "conducted several programs to survey and open selected mail between the U.S. and two Communist countries." One, for presumed counter-intelligence purposes, was "to identify individuals in active correspondence with Communist countries." The others were "designed primarily to determine the nature and extent of censorship techniques." In a secret addendum to his report, he told the Senate subcommittee that the program involved mail from New York and San Francisco to China and the Soviet Union.

Serious Abuses. Still more surveillance of citizens in two unidentified cities occurred in 1971 and 1972, after a source—Colby described him as "a foreigner visiting in the U.S."—told the CIA of a plot to kidnap Helms and kill Vice President Spiro Agnew. *TIME* has learned that the scheme was hatched by revolutionaries in Latin America. Although Colby said that the CIA did alert the Secret Service and the FBI of the plot, an intelligence official reported that the agency conducted the investigation in this country virtually without other agency assistance, scrutinizing the activities of black radicals who were believed to be part of the conspiracy.

Colby declared that all questionable CIA activities have ended and that "certainly, at this time, it is my firm belief that no activity of the agency exceeds the limits of its authority." Still, some subcommittee members were not reassured. Said Democrat John Pastore: "There have been serious abuses of authority not satisfactorily explained by the director." But Subcommittee Chairman John McClellan seemed satisfied by the report, saying that the CIA's "mistakes" had been corrected and were "more or less incidental." His obvious lack of enthusiasm fueled sentiment in Congress for taking the investigation out of the hands of the chairmen of four congressional panels that are making parallel CIA inquiries. This week the Senate's Democratic caucus was expected to vote to set up a special, bipartisan investigating committee patterned after the Senate Watergate committee.