

A Blue Ribbon Goat

NYT 1/7/75
By Tom Wicker

The "blue ribbon" commission appointed by President Ford to protect the public against domestic spying by the C.I.A. looks suspiciously like a goat set to guard a cabbage patch. Having the C.I.A. investigated by such a group is like having the Mafia audited by its own accountants.

Not that the "blue ribbon" panel is likely to indulge in unadulterated whitewash. Mr. Ford's spokesman concedes that enough C.I.A. abuses have been alleged to warrant investigation. So Mr. Ford's commission can hardly ignore these charges, and may even sustain some of them. The question is whether this group can be expected to go any further—whether it will really dig into the agency's operations and history, examine its control and direction, question even the need for its existence in the same form and with the same powers and immunities it had in the darkest days of the Cold War a quarter-century ago.

It can be confidently predicted that this commission, instead, will get lavish C.I.A. cooperation, obtain its information mostly through that cooperation, and ultimately publish a report that rebukes unnamed officials for "lack of judgment" or for being "overzealous" in protecting national security. A few obvious recommendations for tighter supervision may be thrown in, and the commission will surely express confidence in the C.I.A.'s future behavior and reaffirm the vital necessity for the agency's indispensable services.

This prospect is suggested, first, by the commission's origins. It is the brainchild of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who has been the chairman of the Forty Committee, the high-level body that gives the agency its policy direction and control. Thus Mr. Kissinger himself might conceivably be damaged by further revelations of agency abuses.

The commission apparently was discussed in advance with those to be investigated: William E. Colby, the C.I.A. director, and Richard Helms, who was director when domestic spying is alleged to have been at its peak. Mr. Kissinger already has stated that he sees no reason to relieve Mr. Helms of his post as Ambassador to Iran. Vice President Rockefeller, who is Mr. Kissinger's close friend, patron and one-time boss, was proposed for the chairmanship by Mr. Kissinger—who obviously does not intend to lose control of the inquiry or let it conflict too sharply with his personal or foreign policy interests.

Another thing wrong with the commission is Mr. Rockefeller. Not only is

he closely associated with Mr. Kissinger; all during the Nixon Administration, he also was a member of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which is charged with such civilian review of C.I.A. activities as there is. He, too, could be damaged if it is now disclosed that in those years he was either duped by the C.I.A. or acquiesced in its improper activities.

More than that, however, Mr. Rockefeller has been throughout his public career a renowned Cold Warrior, a persistent advocate of strong military policies against Communist expansion, a critic of peaceful co-existence, one who considered nuclear war survivable and therefore thinkable—a hard-liner who is not likely to be overly critical of C.I.A. efforts to "protect the national security," even if they were "overzealous." A chairman more in sympathy with the C.I.A.'s world view, or with the "vital necessity" for its operations could hardly be found.

Still a third problem is the membership, which appears thoroughly estab-

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lishmentarian and conventional. The only demonstrated departure from accepted views in this group is rightist and militarist, in the persons of Ronald Reagan and Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer. George Meany's secretary-treasurer, Lane Kirkland, and Douglas Dillon, a pillar of the foreign policy establishment, are not likely to dig further into C.I.A. "national security" operations than they have to.

There is no strong critic of foreign policy or of the defense and intelligence establishments, no active civil libertarian—not even a revisionist academic to leaven the commission's deliberations with skepticism or outrage. Only Erwin Gislwold, who once fought Joe McCarthy, and John T. Connor and Edgar Shannon, both of whom opposed the invasion of Cambodia, offer hope that an articulate minority might at least challenge the C.I.A.'s protestations and evasions.

This commission, moreover, includes no women and no minorities, both of whom warrant representation as part of the public, and either of which might have contributed valuable non-establishment perspective. But that was clearly not wanted on this commission, whose task, Chairman Rockefeller told The Associated Press, is to "restore public confidence without damaging a very important organ of national security."

No mention there of protecting the rights of Americans. Rather, the problem seems to be to convince them that there is no problem.