

Secret Agents' End ⁵⁻¹₂₋₂₇₋₆₇

The State Sovereignty Commission has terminated contracts with 10 secret investigators. The commission, which has been under fire, took the action after it agreed to return to the state treasury \$30,000 in surplus funds it had carried over in contravention of law from the last fiscal year.

State Treasurer A. P. Tugwell earlier had called for a freeze on commission funds until the agency remitted the \$30,000 to the treasury. Mr. Tugwell acted after legislative auditor J. B. Lancaster, following an audit, recommended that the money be returned as required by law.

The existence of the surplus was first brought to light last year by States-Item reporter Bill Lynch after the commission was allowed to carry the surplus over to the current fiscal year. The General Appropriations Act directs otherwise.

The commission was formed in 1960 for the ostensible purpose of fighting for states rights and against segregation. Since then it has become the most secretive of state agencies.

Such secrecy, defenders of the commission explained, was necessary for the agency to carry out its operations.

Unfortunately, some of the commission's operations have included publishing partisan political literature. What else it has done, no one is precisely sure, since it is specifically excepted from the Public Records Act.

But there are many who doubt its work has contributed very significantly to the state.

Earlier, commission director Sam Short had said that if the commission were forced to remit the surplus it would be "bankrupt."

The commission has now agreed to return the money. We can now only hope that Mr. Short's prophecy will be borne out.