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Insight and Outlook . . . By Joseph Kraft

Fence-Mending at CIA

IN A STATEMENT made the other day while awarding a medal to the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, Adm. William F. Raborn, the President put his finger on the heart of the trouble that has recently been afflicting the Agency. Rightly understood, the President's remarks point the way to some fence-mending that can be done by the new director, Richard Helms.



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The President said: "It is the lot of those in our intelligence agencies that they should work in silence—sometimes fail in silence, but more often succeed in silence. Unhappily, also, it is sometimes their lot that they must suffer in silence."

The trouble with the CIA is that it has not been working in silence. Indeed it could hardly have attracted more attention if it had deliberately set out to cultivate publicity in the fashion of the FBI.

In recent months the Agency has been the subject of a best-selling book; a profile in Esquire Magazine; a series of newspaper articles; and—for who shall escape whipping?—not a few newspaper columns. It has also been involved in a law suit, a spectacular case centering on an alleged jewel theft, and a long Senate debate, remarkable, even in that genre, for being unenlightened and unenlightening.

ONE REASON for all the publicity, of course, is that in the past at least a few officials of the CIA have felt muteness to be martyrdom. In the face of adverse

criticism in some quarters, they have turned to other quarters for more favorable publicity—thus only making matters worse.

The first order of correctional business is to root out the maudlin self-pity that makes so many of the people in the CIA think they ought to have a good press. The fact is that they are volunteers not conscripts. And silence is a part of the job, not an aspect of a cruel fate that might once in a while be set right with the occasional self-justifying leak.

The true seat of the difficulty, however, does not lie there. The main reason there has been so much publicity about the Agency in books, magazines, newspapers and even the courts, is that there is a market for the stuff.

The public, or at least a segment of the public, has developed a certain idea—a stereotype—about the Agency. According to this stereotype:

The Agency is supposed to be committed by reason of self-interest and ideology to the indefinite prolongation of the cold war. It is supposed to use its secret information to influence American policy in the direction of harsh, intransigent stands. It is also supposed to make and break foreign governments along the same lines. Finally, it is supposed to use the cloak of secrecy and "the national interest" to cover up its activities and its horrible past.

To anyone who has watched the American Government, the stereotype is virtually unrecognizable. But for just that reason

those who want to believe it, feed on the merest shreds of supporting evidence. Most of the current literature about the Agency, and, it seems to me, some of the fuss in the Senate and over the "jewel theft" is designed to minister to these appetites.

IF THIS ANALYSIS is correct, the deep problem for the Agency is somehow to dispell the stereotype, to present to the public a different face. That is not an easy job, nor one that can be accomplished swiftly. But there are at least two things that might be helpful.

First, in the selection of a Deputy Director to Helms, an effort should be made to go against the grain of the stereotype. While the job requires someone not altogether ignorant of foreign policy and intelligence practices, the new man probably also ought to be an outsider (with no interest in covering up past mistakes or prolonging old quarrels) given to study and evaluation (rather than black bag tricks). Most important of all, given the large status and size of the Defense Intelligence Agency, there is now no requirement that a military man be either director or deputy director of CIA.

Second, it would be useful to add to the informal legislative group that serves as a watchdog on the Agency some representation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Agreement on such a change was nearly reached in the course of the Senate fight last month. It would plainly do no harm; it would help to make it visible to all that the CIA is not an invisible government.

JOSEPH ALSOP
is on vacation. His column will be resumed when he returns.