

Postscript to A "Dossier Society"

Sam Ervin, the Senate's indefatigable libertarian watchdog, has added some interesting particulars to his generalized and repeated charges that "the military, primarily the Army, had instituted an organized system of surveillance of the activities of Americans here in the United States." He has received information from a former army intelligence agent, he said on Wednesday, "that during the course of its surveillance of domestic political activities the army was not merely concerned with actions of fringe groups which have demonstrated a predilection for violence or illegal conduct . . . It appears that army intelligence, at least since 1968, but probably earlier as well, and up to June of this year at least, was actively covering the activities of individuals and groups against whom no charge of political extremism can possibly be made." And he named specifically among the Army targets "the junior Senator from Illinois, Mr. Stevenson, the former Governor of Illinois, now Judge Otto Kerner, a member of the other body, Congressman Abner Mikva, state and local officials, plus well-known political contributors of both parties, newspaper reporters, religious figures, lawyers and local and national figures. These are only a few of the reportedly 800 individuals who were targets of the military intelligence system in only one state, Illinois."

The Senator expressed a hope that the information he has received is not true and promised that his Constitutional Rights Subcommittee will hold hearings on the problem in February. The sooner and the more exhaustively, the better in our judgment. Meanwhile, the President's press secretary declared that the President unequivocally opposes spying by the military on political figures and will not permit such activity in his administration. And Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor has asserted emphatically that "on the basis of information I have received, I can state that neither Sen. Stevenson, Rep. Mikva nor former Gov. Kerner are, or

have ever been, the subject of military intelligence activities or investigations related to political activities."

Well, what Secretary Resor says is nice. But it somewhat bypasses the main point. The political figures allegedly involved in this military snooping merely add some decorative whipped cream to the pudding. The essence of the matter is that the Army—and the other military services as well—have arrogated to themselves some sort of authority to examine and pass judgment upon the activities and associations of American civilians. It just doesn't make a hoot of difference whether the civilians involved are distinguished public officials or what George Orwell called mere proles.

The rationale by which the military presumes to transmute itself into the supervisor rather than the servant of the civilian is ingenious but thoroughly mischievous. The armed services, according to an assistant secretary of defense, have a mission to gather information on "demonstrations, agitation, propaganda and disruptive activities directed against the role of the United States in Vietnam, Selective Service or the military establishment . . ." This spurious notion gained color from the use of federal troops to control civilian populations in the civil disturbances at Detroit in 1967 and in Baltimore, Washington and Chicago in 1968.

But demonstration, agitation, propaganda are legitimate activities of free citizens so long as they are carried on without violence or the infraction of duly enacted statutes. The notion that government agents, whether military or civilian, are jotting down the names of persons who lawfully engage in these activities—and storing them away somewhere in mechanized memory banks—is a peril to the political process in a free country. It puts an intolerable burden on freedom of expression and freedom of association. The end result of this kind of surveillance is what Senator Ervin has aptly called a "dossier society."

**“We Don't Yet Have Cameras That Can See
Through The Roofs — In Indochina”**

