

## The Washington merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — The Justice Department now faces the ticklish task of determining who should be prosecuted for the crimes that the Central Intelligence Agency committed.

Under CIA auspices, murders were plotted, offices were burglarized, letters were opened, telephones were tapped, defectors were abused and unsuspecting victims were dosed with LSD.

Our sources swear that the Justice Department will prosecute the federal violations and will turn over the states evidence of local violations.

But the dilemma that already is dividing the Justice Department is whether to go after the top leaders who ordered the illegal acts or the agents who carried them out.

Government agents seldom have been prosecuted for criminal conduct if they were acting under orders. Yet there is even a stronger tendency on the part of the big brass to protect one another.

After the My Lai massacre, the generals in charge of the operation were never indicted. And the Watergate burglars, together with their ringleaders G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, spent more time in the slammer than did their superiors who got early paroles.

Our Justice Department sources say many legal questions must be resolved before it is decided which cases will be pushed. But the prosecutors will do their best, our sources say, to prove that top CIA officials were fully aware they were operating outside the law and, therefore, should be brought before the bar of justice.

**DANGEROUS DRINKING WATER:** The Environmental Protection Agency's new drinking water standards, it is alleged, do nothing to filter cancer-causing substances from the nation's tap water.

The Environmental Defense Fund charges in an unpublished report that the latest government standards are a "travesty." They are so low, claims the report, that 92.1 per cent of the country's communities already meet them. Indeed, the standards are no better than the 1962 Public Health recommendations for water purity, the report states.

At the eleventh hour, EPA allegedly increased the "safe" levels for fluoridation by 100 per cent. It also encouraged use of chlorine to disinfect the water supplies instead of advocating safer filtration methods, the report charges.

An EPA spokesman told us that the cancer-causing traces, cited by the Environmental Defense Fund, are only "suspects" and not proven killers in the drinking water. The spokesman denied that EPA's water standards threaten public health.

**CAPITOL CRIME:** Two months ago, we reported the mysterious disappearance of 14 rare aluminum pennies from congressional custody. They were pilfered, apparently, by light-fingered legislators who may be able to sell them some day for up to \$1.4 million.

The missing coins were prototypes for a possible new issue of aluminum pennies, which the U.S. Mint considered minting during the 1973 copper shortage.

Mint Director Mary Brooks passed out 16 prototypes to the Senate and House Banking committees, so the members could see what the proposed pennies would look like. Only two of the samples were returned.

It appears as if a serious crime has been committed by some distinguished thieves on Capitol Hill. This puts poor Mrs. Brooks in a delicate spot. If she asks the Secret Service to investigate the congressional caper, she will antagonize the powerful banking committees that oversee her operations.

So she maintains the myth that the pennies are still in the custody of the two committees and, therefore, aren't officially missing. This makes it unnecessary for her to call in the Secret Service, which isn't about to investigate high congressional muck-a-mucks without an official request.

A spokesman for the Mint insisted, meanwhile, that if the pilfered pennies show up in anyone's rare coin collections, they will be seized forthwith, and both the buyer and seller will be dumped in the pokey.

We polled top experts from coast to coast who agreed, with one exception, that they would be afraid to touch the pennies now. The single exception said he would be willing to buy the coins on the black market for \$10,000 apiece.

All the experts agreed that the value will soar as the years pass. They pointed out that a 1913 Liberty-head nickel, which also was never put into circulation, recently sold for \$100,000. Only five are known to be in existence.

If the coins should ever become available for sale, the experts believe they will bring as high as \$100,000 each. The lowest estimate was \$5,000 each if all 14 coins went on the market at the same time. The average evaluation was \$35,000.

The Mint's own confidential estimate was that the pennies, if they should ever become legally saleable, would be worth at least \$25,000 apiece.

This may explain why the sticky-fingered solons, despite discreet requests on Capitol Hill for the return of the rare coins, are hanging on to them.