

## The CIA Commission

Post 1/7/75

MR. FORD did a wise thing in appointing his own "blue ribbon" panel to see whether the CIA has stepped outside the bounds of its legislative charter in the past and whether existing safeguards are adequate to keep the agency inside those bounds in the future. Anything less would have indicated an unacceptable degree of indifference both to the recent newspaper allegations of "illegal domestic spying" and to Mr. Ford's own special post-Watergate responsibility to demonstrate that he is using the great powers of his office properly. To have relied just on internal accounts from the agency under challenge would have satisfied no one. It should be very useful to the President, as he moves to assert his personal control over the CIA and to meet the public's anxieties about it, to have available his own report. There is a considerable public clamor—long overdue, in our view — for a thoroughgoing review of the role and operations of the agency. The work of this new commission, which is to be chaired by Vice President Rockefeller, should help Mr. Ford participate actively and responsibly in that review.

The White House had no sooner announced the members of the panel than the choice came under attacks of two sorts. First, it was suggested that the members, such as Mr. Rockefeller, a Nixon appointee to the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, are too prone by background or belief to pro-CIA or pro-security bias. But Mr. Ford should hardly be blamed for appointing members who share his basic judgment that there are two goals—preserving democratic freedoms and preserving the CIA's "effective intelligence and counter-intelligence capability" — here to be served. It also seems

something of a libel to assume that a former solicitor general and a former university president, among other panelists, cannot see the larger public purpose of this commission. The panelists know, too, that they will have the Congress, which will be making several investigations of its own, looking over their shoulder. From this new Rockefeller commission, which is to report in only three months, no one expects the last word—not even Mr. Ford, who underlines that he is reviewing the CIA as a "co-operative" project with the Congress.

The other broad criticism of the panel is that it is not truly expert, national and representative. But again, this is not a commission established to treat a gaping wound in the nation's side, a problem of such dimensions that conventional approaches are inadequate. The problem at issue is, though significant, fairly restricted: Has one agency gotten off the rails? Moreover, the results of this commission's work almost certainly have to include new legislation or new administrative procedures: developments which are political rather than psychic in nature. In this regard, the Rockefeller commission will need a certain political credibility with Congress if it is to help generate effective legislative reform of the CIA. Reznick Davis simply would not have the same impact as Ronald Reagan or Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer or, let us say, Sen. John Stennis. With all that has happened since its beginnings in 1947, the need for a redefinition and refinement of the CIA's legislative charter and authorized mission would seem to us to be self-evident. Our hunch is that it will be evident enough to the eight men picked by President Ford. In brief, the new commission ought to be judged by its work.