

## At Home With the CIA

It continues to mystify us why the Central Intelligence Agency, whose effectiveness depends on the subtlety and savvy with which it carries out its vital mission, manages to get involved in one public controversy after another. Well, there go our superspies again, bumbling across the front pages because some of them apparently could not distinguish between their work and someone else's. Chalk up another propaganda coup for the CIA's foreign adversaries and domestic critics, whether or not subsequent investigation establishes serious misdeeds on the part of the agency.

Last weekend's report by The New York Times of large-scale domestic-intelligence activity by the CIA — apparently in violation of the agency's 1947 congressional charter — calls for a searching inquiry into what the agency has been up to and what is needed to keep it on the right track in the future. Until more facts are produced, we will not attempt a final judgment on the allegations. But the claim that the CIA maintained intelligence files on at least 10,000 Americans, and engaged in various "illegal" covert operations in this country, deserves the most intense scrutiny in the next session of Congress. This, to be followed by corrective action if needed, is in the interest of American freedom as well as the health of the intelligence community itself.

There is good reason for keeping the CIA out of the domestic-intelligence purview of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Besides the simple mat-

ter of observing the law. The CIA has its hands full carrying out its foreign-intelligence mandate with American interests under attack almost everywhere in the world. For this task the CIA needs a flexibility and a freedom from day-to-day public accountability that, if suffered at home, could compromise the constitutional rights of Americans. While much CIA work involves undramatic information-gathering and analysis, the agency also engages in clandestine operations that, again, cannot be countenanced on the domestic scene. The FBI has the clear authority to enforce federal law in this country, and to guard against internal subversion.

Admittedly there are "gray areas," where the CIA's foreign counter-intelligence and the FBI's domestic-intelligence activities might overlap — American suspects with foreign connections and vice versa. But this would not explain a wholesale CIA involvement in the investigation of American dissidents like antiwar protesters and black extremists. There are hints that the paranoia of the Nixon White House was at work, as well as presidential dissatisfaction with the FBI of J. Edgar Hoover and a breakdown of CIA-FBI cooperation. The Nixon crowd managed to involve the CIA peripherally in Watergate, sought greater participation in the coverup and perhaps succeeded in otherwise diverting the CIA from its legitimate field. The new allegations raise serious questions about the leadership of former CIA Director Richard

Helms, now ambassador to Iran. If an investigation proves it necessary, Helms should be called back to explain his role.

The objective of future investigations should not be to destroy the CIA, which has performed much of its function ably and is more than ever needed in these hazardous and complicated times. The aim should be to strengthen the CIA's effectiveness by keeping it on target. Better congressional oversight would be a valuable safeguard, as well as a White House sensitive to the proper use of the CIA and determined to prevent misuse. President Ford promises the latter.

In the process of eliminating any ambiguities about the CIA's lawful functions and assuring adherence to clear jurisdictional rules, the agency should benefit. At the least, it should get some blessed relief from the repeated controversies that rob it of public and congressional support.