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CIA: Sinned Against or Sinning?

It is fortuitous yet fitting that congressional investigations of the Central Intelligence Agency are gearing up just as the Watergate trial is winding down. During the series of revelations that finally crushed the Nixon administration, the CIA often was depicted as being more sinned upon than sinning. It was the CIA that provided disguises and other paraphernalia used by White House "plumbers" in the burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971. It was the CIA that was urged by the Nixon White House to limit FBI probes of the Watergate break-in a year later and to provide what amounted to hush money for the former CIA operatives involved.

In both instances, the CIA was said to have drawn back after becoming momentarily involved in illegal activities as a result of White House pressure. Mindful that its mandate precludes its exercising "police, subpoena, law enforcement powers or international security functions" within the boundaries of the United States, the CIA in both cases supposedly avoided being compromised—though only just.

If true, this was a somewhat reassuring state of the affairs. The Nixon administration, after all, was only a passing phenomenon. But the CIA was an enduring, covertly financed agency, and if it was

really sticking to foreign intelligence operations and staying out of domestic matters the nation's democratic institutions would be the better for it.

The Watergate and Ellsberg revelations called attention to the abuse and misuse of the CIA in only two highly publicized instances. But together with disclosures of Mr. Nixon's interest in a special intelligence units completely outside legal channels, they were bound to raise questions whether transgressions of basic civil rights were more widespread. The *New York Times* has reported that the CIA kept dossiers on 10,000 Americans and, more seriously, engaged in repeated instances of breaking and entering and in wiretapping U.S. citizens within the boundaries of the United States. Senator William Proxmire has stated he has corroborative information to this effect. The agency appears to have concentrated its effort on the very anti-war activists that caused paranoia in the Nixon White House.

As trials against the men who aided and abetted Mr. Nixon's illegalities come to an end, it is mandatory that Congress and the Department of Justice look thoroughly into the operations of the CIA. The country has just gotten rid of a corrupt administration. Now we must be sure that some of this corruption is not permitted to linger in the most powerful and sensitive of government institutions.