

The Joy of Snooping

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THE CIA AND THE CULT OF INTELLIGENCE. By Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks. Knopf. 398 pp. \$8.95

By LAURENCE STERN

THERE WAS A PERIOD last year when the timing seemed right, when Congress finally had political grounds to conduct that long-overdue examination of the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

High-ranking CIA officials were trooping up to Capitol Hill in frequency and numbers approaching the level of high school seniors at Easter recess. Agency men who not long ago would have rather swallowed the pill than be caught within sight of still cameras were suddenly pi-rouetting before four separate congressional committees.

The men from the agency came with their impassive faces and sharply circumscribed testimony designed mainly to "distance" their place of employment from the political crimes of Watergate. But as soon as senatorial questioning began blundering into the CIA's own busi-

LAURENCE STERN is a reporter on the national staff of *The Washington Post*.

ness the answers trailed off into calculated obscurity, as a visiting homicide squad detective might be rebuffed for asking the price of the house.

What was the extent of the CIA's role in the Chilean coup? Was it involved in the junta's take-over in Greece? Is there any prospect of more large-scale CIA operations such as the war in Laos? What is the extent of the agency's domestic operations?

The answers came back, engraved with politeness, but ungiven: "To the best of my knowledge, Senator, no." "I would be happy, Senator, to go into that a little more in closed session." "We have no evidence of that, sir."

And yet these questions were all symptomatic of the need for a serious and comprehensive oversight job on what the CIA is up to, what sort of checkreins there are to its covert operations targeted within the United States as well as abroad. The need has existed. The political opportunities are rare.

This is not to question the legitimacy of intelligence gathering or the need for forms of state security in the American government, consistent with what we consider to be the base price that must be paid for maintaining an open society. The requirement for review applies most urgently to the operational programs of the CIA's clandestine services which are conducted beyond the

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pale of public assent to serve often questionable interests in achieving dubious goals by illicit means.

What we are talking about is United States financial manipulation of foreign elections and domestic political processes, the mounting of coups, toppling of governments, bribery of public officials, clandestine programs of political control through blackmail, terrorism, murder, sabotage and "psywar." We are talking about programs of disinformation (a term of the art for counter-propaganda) directed against United States audiences, as well as manipulation of the news media.

The Watergate scandal has shown us that the CIA, for all its vaunted acumen at the intelligence game, was played for a patsy (and that is the charitable view) by the White House to help stage a disinformation and espionage operation against Daniel Ellsberg at a time when he was campaigning against the resumption of bombing of North Vietnam.

The presumption of innocence on the part of the CIA shrinks considering the behavior of CIA Director William E. Colby in the fall of 1972 upon being questioned by former Watergate Prosecutor Earl J. Silbert about the identity of the White House official who first requested CIA assistance for E. Howard Hunt. Colby's response, at first, was evasive. He "danced around the room for ten minutes," by his own admission, before Silbert finally pinned him to the wall with a direct question. The answer was John D. Ehrlichman. Colby explained afterwards that he was reluctant to inject a name so controversial as Ehrlichman's into the case.

In doing so, he came within a hairline of obstruction of justice. Had it not been for Silbert's persistence—and perhaps the fact that Silbert knew the answer to his own question—Colby might have succeeded in willfully concealing information from a government prosecutor in a pending criminal case.

Watergate must indeed have brought a special anguish to the CIA. For the White House, in trying to put the Watergate monkey on the agency's back, used some of the same techniques that have been employed by the CIA in its own operations. There was the diffuse charter of "national security" through which the White House operatives sought to stall the FBI investigation of Nixon campaign funds through Mexico, to arrange for covert payoffs of the Watergate suspects, to disseminate a cover story that the Watergate burglary was a CIA operation, and so forth.

The agency was, in effect, being targeted as a decoy by the president's office which was dipping into the classic black bag of dirty tricks.

Hunt and his Cuban proteges, then in the pay of the Committee for the Re-election of the President (CREEP) were so ingrained in the ways of their alma mater at Langley, the Clandestine Services,