P 5/24/77 *Intelligence Oversight*

THE SENATE Intelligence Committee, set up a year ago in the wake of revelations of awesome intelligence-agency flaws, reports forthrightly that it's performing its new oversight job well. The agencies "are now fully and properly accountable to the Congress," says the committee, and once charters (specific legislative mandates) are written for each agency, "we are confident . . . we will not see a repetition of the widepread abuses of the past."

Fine and dandy. But given the secrecy that still envelops most intelligence activity, how does the public know whether the intelligence community is leveling with the committee and whether the committee is reporting accurately on its own performance? We can't know enough, but we can do some surmising. Against the convenience of concealing dark deeds from Congress, the agencies must weigh the risk of disclosure by whistle blowers and the cost in congressional and public confidence of having such a breach of trust revealed. As for the high marks the committee gives itself, we are impressed that a panel whose membership spans the broadest part of the Senate's political spectrum could work through a year's detailed agenda—including, for instance, the first line-item review of the whole intelligence budget—without raising cries of "leak," on the one hand, or "coverup," on the other.

The hardest part of the committee's work, however, may lie ahead. It must write and help enact laws to bring intelligence in from the cold of executive discretion to the control of legislation, and to ensure that citizens' rights are respected in the process. And it must find effective ways to see to it that the agencies' intelligence product is of a quality, relevance and timeliness to match the country's international requirements.

How long will the House shirk its plain responsibility to create its own intelligence committee? Its select (temporary) intelligence committee self-destructed last year. Can't Speaker O'Neill put this particular Humpty Dumpty back together again?