

The 2 I.D.I.U.'s

To the Editor:

The story of government political surveillance has many villains. Ramsey Clark is not one of them.

The claim is that as Attorney General in 1967 Ramsey Clark created the Interdepartment Information Unit (I.D.I.U.). This was "a plan to spy on dissidents," in the words of William Safire [column May 10], who supports his charge with a sentence in the Church Committee report describing the I.D.I.U. as "the focal point of a massive domestic intelligence apparatus." Earlier, the Rockefeller Commission called the I.D.I.U. the "first in a series of secret units designed to collate and evaluate information concerning the growing domestic disorder and violence."

At least so long as Ramsey Clark was in office, the I.D.I.U. was no such thing. The I.D.I.U. was not "secret." It was described in Attorney General Clark's 1967 year-end report to the President, who disclosed its contents through his press secretary on Jan. 12, 1968.

It was not a plan to spy on dissidents. Originally an experimental summer student project, it began formal operation in December 1967 in direct response to ghetto disturbances in Newark, Detroit and other cities. It had no operational capability. What it attempted to do was to collate and evaluate information already in the possession of government agencies and in such public sources as newspapers. The purpose was to help the Justice Department try to predict what urban ghetto would blow next and to guide the department in determining what to do about it.

The I.D.I.U. (renamed Interdivisional Intelligence Unit) did become "the focal point of a massive domestic intelligence apparatus." But that was after Ramsey Clark left office. By then, Richard Nixon, who had campaigned for President with the promise to fire Clark, had his own people in the Department of Justice.

The Church Committee, perhaps in an effort to achieve bipartisan accord through the appearance of evenhandedness, has telescoped the innocuous early functions of the I.D.I.U. under Ramsey Clark into the more sinister functions it acquired after Nixon replaced Clark. This is a disservice both to Clark and to our understanding of recent history.

FRANK DONNER
South Norwalk, Conn., June 10, 1976