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Giving "Paranoia" a "Bum Rap"

The Nixon administration appears to have reacted with wanton ingratitude to the critics of the FBI. All that they have been saying, if we understand them, is precisely what the bureau wants people to think about it—that it is a scourge to dissent in any form which it chooses to consider dangerous—which usually means dissent from the Left—and that it is omnipresent in its surveillance. You will recall, of course, that one of the documents stolen from the FBI office at Media, Pa., encouraged agents to step up interviews with dissenters "for plenty of reasons, chief of which are it will enhance the paranoia endemic in these circles and will further serve to get the point across there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox."

Isn't that just the impression Senator Muskie was fostering when he asserted that the FBI kept an eye on 40 to 60 "Earth Day" conservation rallies all over the nation last spring? Isn't that really the sense of what Representative Hale Boggs had in mind when he suggested recently that the bureau was listening intently to conversations in the offices of congressmen? Yet presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler reproached Senator Muskie for attempting to create "a feeling of fear and intimidation" among Americans. And Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst said that Mr. Boggs was either "sick or . . . not in possession of his

faculties," an extremely harsh judgment, in our opinion, concerning a fellow who was only doing his bit to enhance paranoia.

Perhaps the administration doesn't altogether understand the meaning of paranoia—or at least the meaning of the term in its current context. Paranoia is an ailment which becomes endemic in a political community when an attorney general says that he is endowed with "inherent" power to do anything he deems "reasonable" in the name of national security, the Constitution to the contrary notwithstanding. Paranoia is liable to become epidemic when a President dismisses as a "bum rap" every attempt to protect privacy and liberty against overarching governmental intrusion. And paranoia is liable to assume the proportions of a plague when a senator who is supposed to be the spokesman for one of the major political parties presumes to parallel something which he calls "Muskieism" with the national sickness identified in the 1950s as "McCarthyism." Senator Muskie has sought to do no more than protect law-abiding American citizens against pervasive government snooping; the late Senator McCarthy operated a pillory in which he persecuted individuals whom he accused, judged and condemned as communists. Linking the two would be an indecency, were it not so patently an asininity.