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Abolish the CIA: it's the only cleansing

The Rockefeller Commission did not fulfill its purpose. It did not because it could not.

The purpose of an expert panel making a report to the President is to clear up public doubt about murky situations. The Warren Commission on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Eisenhower Commission on violence, the Kerner Commission on riots, the Walker Commission on the Chicago convention — these and other reports were controversial.

But their investigations were thorough and their results were made public. The controversy arose from an irreducible minimum of confusion in events and of prejudice in hearers.

The contrast with the Rockefeller Commission is obvious. Even President Ford, while congratulating Rockefeller and saying the report could restore CIA credibility, went on to add that there can be no cover-up because other investigations will follow, or because Ed Levi is a fine man.

The President accepted the report while saying we should withhold judgment. Yet the report's job was to facilitate judgment, and to convince the rest of us that its own norms of judgment were sound.

Ford assured us he did not want to be a Monday

morning quarterback. But that is just the assignment given to investigators.

The reference to Attorney General Levi's integrity was beside the point. The report should have had its own credibility, entirely aside from criminal proceedings.

The attorney general, in this case, may not prosecute individuals for any number of reasons — ambiguity in the law, the statute of limitations, the death of participants in illegal activities (which go back 20 years, the President tells us), the use of "executive privilege" to protect National Security Council members.

The failure to prosecute now does not assure us that the CIA has stayed within the law — either the moral law or the federal statutes. Assuring us of that was the job of the Rockefeller Commission and, by the President's own statement, the commission failed.

Why the failure? Was it the fault of Rockefeller, of Ford, of staff members; a goof in timing, publicity, or organization? None of these things. The fault is in the CIA.

What was desired was a convincing assurance that the CIA has not been out of control and engaged in shabby activities. That

assurance will never be forthcoming, because it has been out of control and engaged in morally shabby operations for some time.

The CIA has inculcated in its members and leaders a feeling that they are above the law; that anything they do for what they conceive to be the national interest is justifiable; that all outsiders, even officials, must be lied to and tricked; that any attempt to check their power is an attack on the country's security and must be foiled.

The name of the CIA is never going to be cleared. The more we learn about it, the more despicable it appears. Its directors have lied to Congress. Its members have routinely broken the law inside the agency, and some have felt commissioned to do so even after they leave the firm. Its defenders fall back on every sleazy argument available.

The only cleansing thorough enough, the only one proportionate to the agency's offenses, is abolition.

The CIA is a secret empire with more resources for protecting itself than for protecting the country. Intelligence work goes on in many bureaus where it can still be controlled. They should be maintained and expanded. The CIA should be "terminated with extreme prejudice."