

W Post

Legislation by Stealth: To Censor the News . . .

The House Internal Security Committee's latest abomination, a bill giving the President harsh penal sanctions to prevent Americans from travelling to "hostile areas," comes up on the House floor today. Sneaked hastily through the committee in an hour and a half (no witnesses against it were heard), the bill was inspired by the recent visits to Hanoi of Jane Fonda and Ramsey Clark, and by the visits of American journalists as well. It would let a Chief Executive so minded—and to judge by the support his Justice Department has given the bill, Richard Nixon is so minded—try to prevent visits to North Vietnam by anyone, whether professional newsmen or war protesters, that he thought would produce reports cutting across his own policy. It would let him, in brief, restrict the free movement of Americans abroad, and, in the process, censor the news.

It seems astonishing that in 1972 a committee of

Congress would want to add to the arbitrary powers of the President, or to curb the travel of Americans, or to deny Americans as broad as possible a range of information about "hostile areas." Whatever one may think about the conduct of a Jane Fonda or a Ramsey Clark, no serious person can deny the value of careful professional news reporting or quarrel with the judgment of Richard Dudman, given in an article elsewhere on this page, that "the more light that is thrown on a national problem, from whatever angle, the better the American people are able to make a judgment as to how to deal with it."

The Internal Security Committee's bill is being brought up today under a House procedure, usually reserved to uncontroversial legislation, which bans amendments and requires a two-thirds vote. The House can show that it has not surrendered American values to partisan vindictiveness by voting the measure down.