

Those Who Play Along and Those Who Don't

Washington

HOUSE MAJORITY leader Tip O'Neill has been to a great many wakes in his life, and he seemed a good man to ask if there is any life left in his Massachusetts colleague, Mike Harrington, as a member of the House CIA Committee.

The leader's answer, after the long night session, was uncharacteristically abstract. "Are you asking if that is more important than that the House investigate the CIA?"

Harrington, as an act of special grace, was allowed to speak for ten minutes. The House is always pious to the dying and the dead. He spoke in his usual complex sentences, in which the subject and the verb are as far apart as he is from the regulars in the House. He is a man devoted to the subordinate clause.

He tried, in a style befitting the melancholy of the occasion, to address the larger issue of credibility and he cast it in stately terms, his muffled plea for a stay of execution. He told them unnecessarily that he was speaking "outside insider status."

He outlined sketchily the plot between the House Armed Services and the Rules Committees, which led to the elaborate "compromise" aimed at getting him off the select committee—of which he was the instigator.

They listened, but they were not convinced. If to some few in the House, Harrington is a man of conscience who broke a written promise to bring to public attention criminal activity by the CIA in Chile, to most members he is simply a man who broke the code by which they live.

He is, in short, an informer and programmed for the informer's fate.

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THE HOUSE has rallied behind the other cause of the painful imbroglio, quiet, bland, side-burned Lucien Nedzi of Michigan, the insider's insider. Nedzi knew about Chile, Nedzi knew about the massive illegal domestic surveillance detailed by the Rockefeller Commission. He even knew about murder. But he never told.

Nedzi may strike some as the CIA "contact" in the House. Whenever the disclosures came out—and he heard about them as the chairman of what is laughingly called the "oversight" committee—Nedzi softened them and accompanied them with CIA assurances that such things are not happening now and will never happen again.

The appointment of Nedzi as chairman of the select committee was perhaps the single greatest folly of the present session, and there is dispute about how it came about. O'Neill says that Robert Giaimo, a steady and highly respected Connecticut Democrat, was to have been chairman, but asked the speaker to name Nedzi because his rejection might cost him re-election. The speaker cannot remember "whether I recommended it to him or whether he recommended it to me."

However it happened, the serial disclosures about what Nedzi knew and when he knew it sparked a revolt in the select committee, prompted his resignation as chairman which the House overwhelmingly rejected by way of showing its enormous regard for men who play the game—and brought about the present scheme which calls for the dissolution of the present committee and its reconstitution with three additional members.

Nobody ever answered Giaimo's impassioned question: "Why? Why? Michael Harrington has as many rights as any member of the House. Is this committee being created to remove Harrington from it?"

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THE REPUBLICANS, who do not wish any scandals breaking during the campaign of a President who is utterly committed to the CIA and high in the polls, kept pointing out the redundancy of a House committee when the Senate is doing so well. They came out for a "permanent solution" by way of the appointment of a joint oversight committee. Minority leader John Rhodes, who said of course any erring branch of government should "be hauled up short"—he stayed with an erring President, it might be noted, until four days before the end—but that the CIA had been "investigated enough."

The CIA question has tied the House in knots, added immeasurably to its image of clumsy pettiness. But it is much more anxious to put down the upstart Harrington and teach him a lesson than it is to bring the CIA to heel. The House can be depended on to put first things first.