



The CIA Tantrum

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WHEN small boys learn there is no Santa they curse Christmas. So it is with the current temper tantrums over the Central Intelligence agency.

The agency is a symbol of a national disillusionment. The small boys in public life are now taking out their disappointment on convenient fall guys — former director Richard Helms and Ted Sorensen who has so nobly withdrawn his name from consideration as next director.

During the early years of the cold war, the CIA seemed relatively exempt from the usual prejudices. It was a salient part of a national consensus, forged during World War II and continued without much change through the two decades thereafter.

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APART FROM doing vital work, the Agency offered something to the chief wings of national opinion. Conservatives, who consider themselves specially entrusted with national security, could feel that the agency was the acme of vigilant activism on the front lines.

Liberals had the satisfaction of knowing that the analytic side of the agency was dominated by intellectuals in such centers as Cambridge and Berkeley.

Vietnam and Watergate revealed a different side of the agency. It was seen to be not efficacious and skillful, but sleazy and bungling.

The falling-off of the agency is part of a large historic process which dwarfs

individuals. After the Cuba missile crisis, the basic cold war confrontation was transformed. Much of the agency did not make accommodation to the new conditions.

But this large, impersonal explanation does not satisfy partisans with axes to grind. Liberals who are pleased to believe that America represents a sick, imperial culture, see the CIA as a prime carrier of the disease. They demand symbolic punishment, and are baying for indictment of former director Richard Helms on the ground that he committed perjury in the Watergate investigation.

Conservatives are pleased to believe that there is a failure of national nerve. They see the agency as the last-ditch trench in their battle to save the country from naive appeasement of Communist power.

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SO THEY opposed Jimmy Carter's nomination of Sorensen, a non-cold warrior, to be the next director. They did it by leak and innuendo and a mud-throwing campaign built on trivial incidents involving Sorensen's use of classified material for his book on Kennedy.

Both Sorensen and Helms are men I have known many years. I know as well as anybody they have shortcomings. But both Helms and Sorensen are dedicated men of high intelligence and strong impulse to public service. They did what they thought was right given the accepted standards of the time.