



That Commission To Probe the CIA

—Joseph Kraft

SAD IS WHAT you have to feel about the blue ribbon panel established by President Ford to look into the latest charges against the CIA. For the right presidential commission offered a chance to restore morale to government and balance to public opinion.

But Mr. Ford has selected a group whose composition is wrong in age, experience and political bias. He has contrived to put together a commission lacking in both expertise and believability, and he has managed that considerable feat more by ineptitude than the dirty motive of wanting to protect the CIA.

A presidential commission was the right way to deal with the charges of domestic spying for one obvious reason. A public inured to official lying by Watergate and Vietnam had no confidence that the regular institutions of government could clean up the agency.

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ONCE it was clear that a presidential commission was the right forum for dealing with the matter, certain basic rules of commissionship come into play. A cardinal rule is that the membership include some professional expertise in the subject under examination.

Another rule is that the membership be broadly representative of the society as a whole, with special emphasis on groups with big stakes in the subject of controversy.

In the case of the panel on the CIA, there were some special considerations. Important national secrets are at stake, and the stuff involved is a proven headline grabber. So there was reason to be spe-

cially concerned to have on the panel responsible persons able to keep secrets and respect lines of inquiry drawn by the President.

President Ford was apparently mesmerized by that consideration. The one thing that can be said for his eight-man panel is that its members are responsible persons who are not going to blow secret information.

But the other basic rules of commissionship are defied. The President moved so slowly in deciding to form the commission that congressional committees got off the mark first. Finding that he was unable to head off all congressional investigations, Mr. Ford decided not to take any congressional figures at all. That virtually guarantees that whatever the commission does, the Congress will upstage and re-do in a blaze of publicity.

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NEITHER has any single member of the commission any experience of how intelligence is generated. In trying to penetrate a highly specialized and arcane way of life, full of persons trained to lie, the committee will be virtually helpless.

Finally, the commission is devoid of inner balance, and gives specially short shrift to those who seem to have been victimized by the illegitimate activities of the CIA. There is not a single prominent opponent of the Vietnam War on the commission. Neither is there a person connected with the press, which did so much to free the issue.

It is difficult to see, in these considerations, how the commission can do any good at all.