

LETTERS TO THE

Harrington Asks a 'Fundamental Question'

Editor — In his column of June 30 James Kilpatrick called for my expulsion from the Congress because I brought to light the CIA's efforts to undermine the government of Chile. That information was secret, he says, and a congressman who won't keep secrets is a danger to the rule of law . . .

Kilpatrick wants us to concentrate on committee regulations — on the fact that a disclosure was made, not on what was disclosed . . . The CIA, with \$8 million of our tax dollars helped bring down the oldest democracy in the Western hemisphere and turn it over to tyrants and torturers. And when the members of Congress responsible for watching over our intelligence operations found out about it, they did nothing. . .

Congress and the nation as a whole need to deal with this fundamental question: What should a Congressman do if he learns from secret testimony that his own government has broken the law? Which comes first — his agreement to abide by secrecy rules, or his obligation to see that official wrongdoing is brought to the attention of his colleagues and other appropriate authorities?

I went with the second alternative, and I think most Americans would agree with me. I think we have learned from Vietnam and Watergate that our leaders have lied to us repeatedly, cloaking the seamiest kinds of activity with appeals to the "national security."

Unfortunately, Congress has not yet learned the lesson — largely because it, too has been sucked into the secrecy game. The handful of Congressmen who were supposed to be keeping tab on the intelligence operations were slipped one secret about illegal activities, and then another, and then another. By the time they were told about the overwhelming outrages they were already compromised. How could they go public with this new information without winding up under fire for

not having revealed what led up to it?

Thus, on the whole, members of Congress have developed the habit of not asking questions about undercover activities in order to avoid any involvement, and the administration and its secret operatives have therefore had a free hand. That is how we reached the point where President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger could decide to get rid of a popularly elected leader of a country with which we were officially at peace, simply because they disagreed with his politics.

The House investigation of the CIA has bogged down precisely because of this problem — members have not yet been willing to challenge the assumptions of a classification system gone wild. But that is what we will have to do if the concept of an informed electorate and democracy itself are going to have any meaning.

MICHAEL J. HARRINGTON

Democratic Congressman
from Massachusetts
Washington, D. C.