

Intelligence Compromise

Though compromise is often assailed by political ideologues, it is the oil of the governmental process. This week four Senators—Mansfield of Montana, Byrd of West Virginia, Ribicoff of Connecticut and Cannon of Nevada—combined to work out a promising compromise which revived the proposal for a Senate intelligence committee that had been left toothless and mangled by the Rules Committee.

Under the Rules Committee bill, the new "oversight" committee would have had neither substantive legislative authority nor budgetary power of any kind. The compromise changes almost all of that. It would give the new committee complete authority over the C.I.A.—substantive legislation, budgetary control and oversight including the right to prior information on covert actions. In addition, it would have budgetary authority over the rest of the national intelligence community, including the domestic intelligence activities of the F.B.I. In regard to those agencies in the intelligence community other than the C.I.A., such as the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency, the new committee would share oversight and responsibility for substantive legislation with the existing standing committees which already have jurisdiction over them.

Thus, for the first time, Congressional fiscal control over the hitherto disparate parts of the nation's intelligence operations will be centered in one place. The members and the staff of the committee will have access to sufficient information and will possess the necessary legislative power to be a match for the executive branch.

The compromise is remarkable because it touches the interests of some of the most sensitive and powerful of the old Senate barons. And it is ingenious because while it does not strip committees such as Judiciary and Armed Services of all of their power in intelligence matters, it concentrates enough power in the new committee to make credible the Senate's intention to curb intelligence abuses. For all the talk of a failed Congressional reform movement, the Senate so far has performed creditably. It should now enact the compromise.