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Editorials

A Curious Role For FBI Agents

THE DISPATCH OF AGENTS of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to the Dominican Republic seems plainly an act of folly. It indicates a gross disregard for Latin American sensibilities and raises qualms about the future.

The White House has not revealed why this impetuous mission was ordered, but two theories are prevalent. The first holds that the President desires to confirm the extent of Communist influence in the revolt against the military junta. FBI verification of earlier estimates made by the Central Intelligence would, it is said, answer those who question the hasty dispatch of the Marines.

A SECOND THEORY SAYS that the agents will check backgrounds of Dominican aspirants to office in the coalition government the United States hopes to see established.

This would amount to Administration naivete of staggering proportions. Door-to-door inquiries by genial gentlemen flashing identification cards and asking how much a neighbor drinks or what he reads may be part of the American way of life, but whether the techniques can be exported is questionable.

NOT TO BE QUESTIONED, however, is the Latin-American reaction. Critics will charge Yankee thought control, and the presence of FBI agents will lend credibility to the accusation.

The Administration has thus presented the Nation's Central and South American critics with effective ammunition.

Sending the agents abroad was a rash act. White House confirmation of their dispatch, plus a refusal to explain their assignment compounds the folly.