leS© to the NEWS
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MAIL SURVEILLANCE

The politicians and the journalists have stirred up a big flap in recent weeks about the discovery that the CIA intercepted and read the mail of a number of prominent Americans, including Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, Edward Kennedy, and Bella Abzug. Everyone interviewed on the subject has expressed himself as shocked that a government agency would do such a reprehensible thing. All this is grist for the mill that is grinding away at our foreign and domestic security agencies.

I would be more willing to credit the sincerity of those now so concerned about the mail surveillance matter if I didn't remember the stunning silence of the liberal establishment when another prominent American was subjected to a secret mail cover back in 1954. The offending agency that perpetrated that gross violation of in dividual civil liberties was not the CIA, or the FBI, or any over-eager security agency, but it was the Senate Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections.

The reason why the liberal establishment developed an acute case of amnesia about this incident was that the victim of the mail cover was the conservative and anti-Communist Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.

The chief counsel of the Senate Subcommittee issued four separate orders to the Post Office to impose a mail cover on all mail deliver ed to the homes of Senator McCarthy, of his fiancee Jean Kerr, of

his administrative assistant, and of another member of his staff.

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Such a mail cover was a violation of federal statutes which specify that mail covers may be placed only "to aid in the apprehension of fugitives from justice." Yet, it was 18 months from the time Senator McCarthy first suspected the existence of the mail cover until he was finally able to make the Senate Subcommittee admit it.

The investigation revealed that the inspection and delay of Senator McCarthy's mail was ordered by Paul J. Cotter, then chief counsel of the Senate Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections. Under prolonged questioning, he testified that he definitely had the "sanction" of some Senator for his action, but could not recall which one and could not find the memorandum in his files authorizing the action. The order he gave used the facsimile signature of Senator Thomas Hennings, which postal authorities accepted as genuine. Hennings and the other Senators disclaimed knowledge of the order.

The liberal establishment, of course, did not defend the mail cover on Senator McCarthy; it was patently indefensible. They just ignored it. It failed to become a cause celebre; it did not produce columns of newsprint or newsworthy comments from assorted dignitaries. Nobody was ever prosecuted, and there was no official censure of the Senate Subcommittee.

If Senators Humphrey and Kennedy are so concerned about a government agency illegally monitoring their personal mail, they can lay the blame on the failure of the liberal establishment to object to that tactic when it was used against an anti-Communist.

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