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Will CIA Probe Really Dig?

WASHINGTON — The first returns from the special committee of three appointed by the President to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency's campus spending spree came from John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

Secretary Gardner, one of the most overworked men in government, said he thought C.I.A.'s student activities had been a mistake, but added that he didn't know "any sensible person who believes that this nation can afford to be without a secret intelligence agency."

At about the same moment, a dissenting view was being expressed on Capitol Hill by historian Henry Steele Commager, who said that the growth of secrecy in government had been one of the most disturbing post war phenomena.

"So much can be done un-

der the cloak of secrecy that is irrevocable," said the author of "The American Mind" to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

When asked about the C.I.A. in cap and gown, Prof. Commager said while he didn't know much about it. He thought it could mean that "we may win the contest with the Communist but lose the values we are defending."

"We want the triumph of the open mind," said Prof. Commager.

Hitherto the Senate has shown itself something less than concerned with this "triumph." It has forfeited its "right to know" in connection with the silent service. It has accepted the burdensome cold-war philosophy that the less said the better about clandestine operations.

But the revelation that the C.I.A. has been more ubiquitous than Mrs. Roosevelt in

her heyday may have produced a slightly more inquisitive spirit among the members, who have asked no questions about dirty work in Budapest but might feel differently about colleges at home.

That at least is the hope of Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.), who is introducing a resolution creating a select committee to look into the C.I.A.'s domestic activities.

The President, who was not involved in the initial decision to send the C.I.A. to college, had hoped to forestall such a move on the part of Congress by appointing his own committee. In addition to Mr. Gardner, it consists of Under-secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach and C.I.A. Director Richard Helms.

The appointment of Helms, caused Chairman J. W. Fulbright of the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee to express doubt about the objectivity of the committee's report. He found it comparable to asking Treasurer Secretary Fowler "to audit the funds of the Federal Treasury."

But Mr. Johnson is always jealous of his prerogatives and eschewed the clear excuse to step clear of the furor.

Sen. McCarthy thinks it would be helpful to both the Agency and to the President, to have an independent investigation of activities that have proved mortifying to the government at home and abroad.

McCarthy is one of more philosophical senators who has always inquired, when he got the chance, about the means the C.I.A. have used to achieve its ends.

He led a fight against the appointment of John McCone, who succeeded Allan Dulles as director, on the grounds

that McCone had been opposed to academic freedom.

Now that the public knows a little more about the methods used to "fight communism," Sen. McCarthy thinks his attempt to call the agency to account, may have a better chance.

His last effort to enlarge the "watchdog" committee, made up of members of the Armed Services and Appropriations Committee, all friends of the agency, was overwhelmingly defeated.

Sen. Richard B. Russell of Georgia, chairman of Armed Services, knowing the fight would be made again, permitted three members of the Foreign Relations Committee to come in as watchdogs. But Sen. McCarthy thinks it is time to break up "the inner ring" mentality which has prevailed in the Senate's cozy surveillance of the silent service.