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Why not probe the investigators?

On the same newscast that announced the death of Rita Hayworth, and maybe for related reasons, the nation was apprised of a bawdy and baseless rumor that Fawn Hall, Oliver North's secretary, had smuggled documents out of the White House in her underwear. Coverage of the Iran-Contra hearings has sunk perilously near the Rona Barrett level.

We are in for every detail, however trivial, of administration misconduct, however technical, with the added proviso, the juicier the better. Keeping perspective in such an atmosphere isn't easy. Whether the Reagan administration violated the Boland Amendment, while it was in effect, is being focused on as if, in isolation, it were a morally critical fact.

But if you step back from these proceedings and the histrionic indignation that attends them, and look at the profile of recent congressional investigations, you are struck by a remarkable pattern.

At one time it was customary to investigate communist and pro-communist activities. Now our elected officials concentrate their attention on anti-communist activities — whether by the CIA, the FBI or the National Security Council. We referee our own side, while ignoring infractions by the other side.

What is missing from the current investigation is more than scrutiny of overtly pro-communist forces, however. We need some investigation of the investigators themselves.

As Congress seeks links between the Nicaraguan Contras and the White House, it is pertinent to ask about links between members of Congress and the Sandinista government. Some visits between congressmen (including Democratic Rep. Pat Schroeder of Colorado) and the Sandinistas have been publicized. Others have not. A few questions:

- Did two congressmen and a senator have amorous affairs with a Sandinista diplomat in Washington?

The answer is more consequential for the fate of this hemisphere than the well-ventilated question of what

time Donna Rice left Gary Hart's townhouse. Rumors about the unnamed senator's alleged affair briefly reached the papers a few years ago; allegations about the two congressmen, if memory serves, did not.

- Did Sen. Edward M. Kennedy act on disinformation fed him by the Sandinista government?

- Has Democratic Rep. Ronald Dellums of California had close personal ties with Fidel Castro and the former communist regime of Grenada?

- Did Rep. Edward P. Boland himself, the Massachusetts Democrat who sponsored the amendment in the headlines, conceal evidence of some fellow Democrats' association with a Soviet front organization?

The answer to all these questions is yes, according to "The Revolution Lobby," by Alan Brownfeld and J. Michael Waller. This booklet, published in 1985 by the Council for Inter-American Security, not only cites chapter and verse for its charges, but even includes reproductions of some of the documents it quotes. Yet Congress and the press have ignored these charges and the evidence for them.

Of course, it is understandable that Congress should avoid confronting possible derelictions and misdeeds of its members. But an adversary press, whose duty is to be critical of the legislative as well as

the executive branch, of Democrats as well as Republicans, and of the left as well as the right, has no excuse for passing over them.

A strange ethos pervades the press nowadays. Digging up scandal about anti-communist forces is honored as "investigative journalism," while finding scandal on the left is scorned as "McCarthyism." The result is that pro-communist groups, some of them funded and directed from abroad, may operate not only with legal impunity, but also with exemption from embarrassing publicity, even when they inveigle elected officials into their doings.

Is it plausible that furtive misbehavior occurs exclusively on the political right? On the contrary, doesn't it stand to reason that countries with no opposition parties, no independent judiciaries and no free press would seize the present chance to dispatch agents to subvert the United States ("the enemy of humanity," according to the Sandinista national anthem) and, if possible, to compromise some of our leaders?

If Mr. Boland is any indication, Congress is not going to investigate itself without some prodding. And the communist countries are not going to investigate themselves. There is no Kremlin Ethics Committee; there are no crusading muckrakers from Pravda.

If the Free World is going to get the full picture it needs, the American press is going to have to do double duty and start scrutinizing the left along with the right.

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