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Recent Books: Visible

THE INVISIBLE GOVERNMENT. By David Wise and Thomas B. Ross. (New York: Random. 1964. 375 pp. \$5.95.)

The journalist-authors of this best-seller admit that Communist subversion and espionage pose a unique threat to the American people and their government, and they accept the necessity under certain circumstances for secret American efforts to prevent Moscow and Peking from gaining new allegiances. But they profess to believe that our secret attempts to meet the Communist challenge constitute so real a threat to our own freedoms that they must be exposed in as detailed and dramatic a way as possible. If the Soviets are profiting from these revelations, as they are, Wise and Ross apparently think that such self-inflicted wounds must be endured in the battle against excessive secrecy.

Broadly stated, their thesis is that the U.S. intelligence community, with the CIA at its heart, has grown so big and powerful that it threatens the democracy it was designed to defend. The CIA, they say, conducts its own clandestine foreign policy, and even the President has been unable to control it. The State Department is powerless to exert policy direction because its ambassadors are kept uninformed and are habitually by-passed by CIA operatives. The Congress has abdicated its legislative role and votes huge secret funds without adequate knowledge of how the money is spent.

If all this were true, American democracy would certainly be in serious trouble, and the alarm professed about the "invisible government" would be justified. But is it true? Strangely enough, the authors themselves provide, ambiguously, a negative answer to this question which is so central to their major thesis. They concede the existence of institutional arrangements designed to give the President and his principal foreign policy advisors the very kind of close policy control over secret operations that they ought to have. Early in the book, they mention the existence of a "Special Group" which makes the major decisions regarding clandestine operations, though they say it is so secret that it is "unknown outside the innermost circle of the Invisible Government." The reader must wait through 255 pages to learn that the members of this policy group are no sinister shadows but McGeorge Bundy in the White House, Secretary of Defense McNamara, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and the Director of Central Intelligence. These are just the officials that one would expect the President to have

chosen to advise him on matters of high clandestine policy, and they are far from invisible.

The authors, in order to prove their thesis, do try to show that the Special Group is ineffective: they claim it meets in "a highly informal way without the elaborate records and procedures of other high Government committees"; there is no "outside analysis" and "little detached criticism"; the members are too busy with their other duties to perform their supervisory function adequately. The impression is left that the President and the Secretary of State are not even informed of the Group's decisions. One must have a very low opinion of the sense of responsibility and competence of the men in these key government positions to believe they behave so cavalierly. And yet if one does not believe this, the authors' whole portrayal of an irresponsible and invisible government becomes inherently incredible.

Similar treatment is accorded the President's Board on intelligence activities formed under the Eisenhower administration and reconstituted by President Kennedy. This is dismissed as a superficial façade with the remark that "both committees were composed of part-time consultants who met only occasionally during the year," and it is implied by use of the past tense that the Board is now extinct. Actually it is very much alive and its membership is no secret, having been announced in a White House release of April 23, 1963. It includes Clark Clifford, William O. Baker, Gordon Gray, Edwin H. Land, William L. Langer, Robert D. Murphy, and Frank Pace. These are able, experienced men who discharge conscientiously their duty of advising the President on the workings of the intelligence community, and it wouldn't have taken much journalistic initiative to find this out. They have a right to resent being dismissed as "vener."

In his last public reference to the CIA, at the time of the Diem crisis in Vietnam, President Kennedy declared, "... I can find nothing, and I have looked through the record very carefully over the last nine months, and I could go back further, to indicate that the CIA has done anything but support policy. It does not create policy; it attempts to execute it in those areas where it has competence and responsibility . . . I can just assure you flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities but has operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence, operating with the cooperation of the National Security Council and under my instructions . . ." The impression grows that Wise and Ross felt obliged to ignore or at least belittle any evidence that the supervision of American intelligence activity is in responsible hands.

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This impression is strengthened by their description of the role of Congress. They grant that the CIA budget and program is subject to review and approval by special subcommittees of the Appropriations and Armed Services Committees of both Houses, but they reject this congressional scrutiny as inadequate. They charge that the subcommittees "are controlled by the most conservative elements in Congress, men who are close personally and philosophically to those who run the 'Invisible Government.'" Then they state the case for a joint congressional watchdog committee, the one specific institutional reform they argue for. So far the watchdog committee idea has been opposed not only by successive administrations but also by the congressional leadership.

If this book is widely accepted at its face value within the United States, it can only reduce public confidence in the intelligence services and make it more difficult for them to recruit the able men and women we shall need in the difficult days that lie ahead. Although incomparably better researched than its forerunner by Andrew Tully,¹ it too tends to portray the American on the clandestine fronts of the cold war as typically a reactionary, unscrupulous blunderer. One chapter purports to describe the desperate efforts of the Peace Corps to prevent itself from being infiltrated by the CIA. Leaders of the Corps are represented as being so fearful that CIA will disobey presidential directives and attempt to infiltrate that they take the most elaborate precautions. The implication is clear that CIA's irresponsibility made such precautions necessary. Only at the end of the chapter will the reader find a brief sentence admitting that no single case of attempted infiltration was ever discovered.

Another effect of the book is to expose for the first time certain individuals and organizations as having intelligence connections and thus sharply increase their vulnerability to Soviet attack. A spokesman for Random House has been quoted as claiming that the book contains nothing that had not already appeared in public print, but in the first chapter the authors boast that "much of the material has never been printed anywhere else before." They insist that they have stayed "within the bounds of national security" but appear to have reserved to themselves the right to decide what those limits are. Such an attitude raises serious questions as to the responsibility of the journalist in a free society in a time of cold war. In Great Britain, which is second to none in its devotion to liberty, there exists an

¹ CIA: *The Inside Story* (New York, 1962).

Official Secrets Act under which the authors would have been tried and sentenced to prison. Such a law in this country is not feasible, but in its absence the American journalist carries an even heavier responsibility than his British counterpart.

By far the most damaging consequence of this book will have been its exploitation by the propaganda apparatus of the Soviet and Chinese regimes. The CIA has understandably been for a long time a primary target of the Soviet KGB, and everything from forgeries to full-length books have been inspired by the Soviet propagandists in their efforts to destroy the reputation of American intelligence organizations and undermine their effectiveness. The KGB technicians must find it hard to believe their good luck in being donated so much useful ammunition by a reputable American publisher and two certifiably non-Communist journalists. The book is being reprinted and replayed in press and radio from one end of the world to the other. That much of this material has been printed before does not reduce the value to the Soviets of having it gathered in one volume under such genuine American auspices.

The problem of balancing freedom with security has been an ancient dilemma for democratic states in their long struggle to survive against aggressive totalitarianisms. This book may serve to dramatize the problem, but it does not provide any deep insight or new solutions. It was written not to enlighten but to shock and to sell.

Charles E. Valpey