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The CIA and the integrity of the campuses

Harvard University is asking the Central Intelligence Agency to stop using its faculty members for secret operations and recruiting. That is a reasonable request. The CIA is balking, however, arguing that its secret campus activities are not illegal and that to suspend them would deprive the agency of important sources. Both sides have asked Congress to arbitrate the dispute.

The dispute, which has implications for universities throughout the country, centers on guidelines that Harvard adopted after 1976 disclosures about the CIA's campus activities. The disclosures were made by the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, which recommended that all intelligence contacts on campuses be open instead of secret. The committee is now revising laws governing intelligence activities, and Harvard President Derek Bok wants Congress to "make it clear that these (secret) activities cannot continue and that the internal rules of academic institutions should be respected."

Bok, supported by many members of the American Association of University Professors, says he is not asking that the substance of CIA work be disclosed, but that when the CIA works with a professor the university be informed of the relationship and that the professor not be used to recruit secretly for the CIA. Bok is especially worried about the CIA using American professors to report on and recruit foreign students, whose numbers are growing on American campuses.

The Senate committee noted in 1976 that many CIA campus contacts are not dangerous, but that the "operational use" of professors raised serious questions about the integrity of academic institutions. Affidavits filed in a recent Freedom of Information Act suit revealed that the CIA nevertheless continues its secret network of campus informants and recruiters.

Bok's principal concern is that secret intelligence activities on campus discredit the academic profession and harm academic institutions. We share that concern, and we think that Congress should accept Bok's recommendations.

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