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Purge of CIA Under Way

THE PURGE, to use a harsh term, of the Central Intelligence Agency is now under way.

The three top men in the agency who were in office at the time of the ill-fated Cuban invasion of last year have been replaced.

Director Allen Dulles gave way to John McCone. Richard Helms has succeeded Richard Bissell Jr. as deputy director of plans. Maj. Gen. Marshall Carter has been nominated by President Kennedy to become the CIA's number two man, replacing Gen. Charles Cabell.

There can be little doubt but that the exodus from the agency's high command was occasioned by the fiasco in Cuba, even though Mr. Dulles, brother of the secretary of state in the Republican administration of President Dwight Eisenhower, had been scheduled to retire.

Publicly President Kennedy minimized the mistakes made in Cuba by the CIA and accepted full responsibility for the catastrophe. But his decision in the matter obviously was grounded in what the CIA had told him.

Whether a mere change in leadership will lessen the chance of grievous error in the future is a question yet to be answered.

The nature of the Central Intelligence Agency's work is such that it is in a position to make

mistakes that those less minutely involved in the operation, like the President, could not readily detect.

Thus, there is always the chance that there could be future bloody disasters as that in Cuba.

One way to minimize this danger is for the President to install in campaign positions men whose ability and integrity he can trust. This could have been accomplished with the McCone, Helms and Bissell appointments.

But, as some congressional critics have asserted, this is not enough to insure that the CIA cannot again involve the country in affairs that might prove damaging to the U.S. international position.

Perhaps there should be checks, outside the executive branch, on the activities of the CIA. That might be accomplished by reporting to proper congressional authority the general outlines of what the agency has in mind. There would be no occasion to tell everything to every congressman.

Even under new leadership the CIA still is a top-secret organization which, though it remains so, must also be held to some legislative accountability to "a few people."